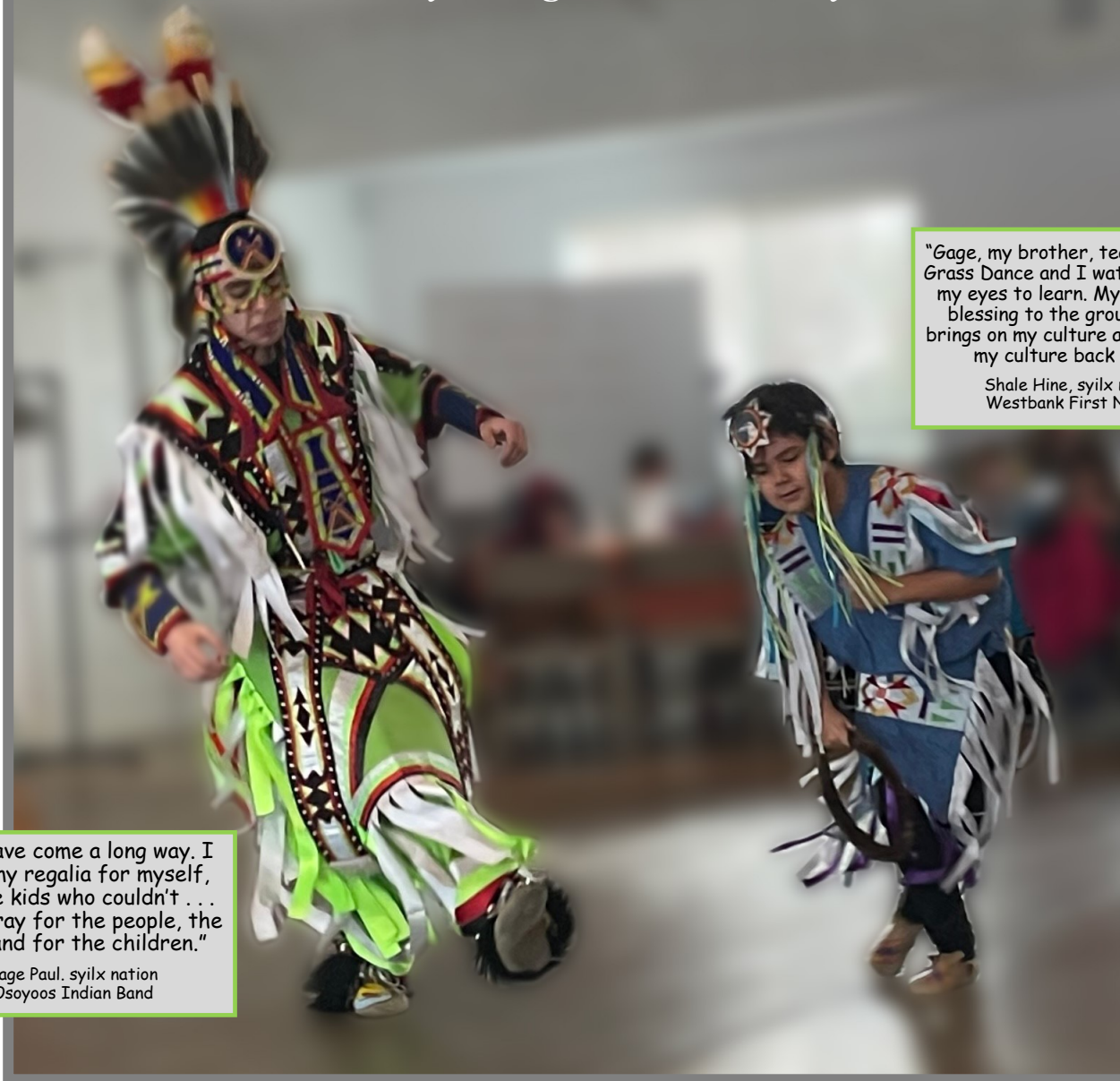


Equity in Action Agreement For Truth & Reconciliation 2020-2025 2023 - 2024 *Fourth Annual Report*

"What does it mean to you to grass dance with your brother?"



"We have come a long way. I wear my regalia for myself, for the kids who couldn't ... and I pray for the people, the land, and for the children."

Gage Paul, syilx nation
Osoyoos Indian Band

"Gage, my brother, teaches me to Grass Dance and I watch him with my eyes to learn. My dance is a blessing to the ground and it brings on my culture and it brings my culture back to us."

Shale Hine, syilx nation
Westbank First Nation

Equity Empowers Each Learner To Thrive Holistically

łałantis i? pəḥpaḥt

In 2023-2024, we inspired WONDER.
Ensemble nous inspirons l'émerveillement.

Together We Learn



Central Okanagan
Public Schools

Indigenous Education



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action Agreement 2020-2025

We acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the syilx People, those who lived here before us.

We are thankful to the syilx for the ways they treated this land, and recognize that if we had respected their ways, our earth would be happier.

They gave back to nature, now it's our turn.

We can do this by composting, recycling, using less paper in class, and by spending time outside.

We love the land because it gives us oxygen, food, rain and beauty.

We love the crunchy leaves, the wind and the sun.

Even in our classroom, our materials are taken from nature.

The earth is worth protecting!

We believe that we should treat each other the same way that the syilx have treated the earth; with respect, kindness and dignity.

We know that being safe and not disrupting the learning of others helps us show kindness to each other.

We also believe that we are all unique, and it is important to have fun and to be creative in class.

**Aaron Veenstra's Grade 6 Collaborative Land Acknowledgement
A.S. Matheson Elementary School**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the Superintendent of Schools/CEO and the Deputy Superintendent of Schools	3
How are our Indigenous Learners Doing?	4-6
Equity in Action Agreement - District Responsibilities 2020-2025	7
Our Year Four District Progress - Student Achievement:	
Policy and Governance	8-10
Learning Environment	11
Pedagogical Core	12-19
Learning Profiles	20
School Community Learning Plans - Focus on Equity	21-31
Our Year Four Indigenous Education Department Responsibilities	32
Our Year Four Indigenous Education Department - Our Progress	
Chief skəmxist Black Bear	33-38
Chief spitlem Bitter Root	39-41
Chief siya? Saskatoon Berry	42-45
Chief n'tyxtix Salmon	46-51
Priorities for the 2024-2025 School Year	52

This report has been prepared by Terry-Lee Beaudry, Jesse Bruce, April Strickland, Christie Russell, and Evelin Mueller.
Special thanks to Chris Velasco and Artona for their contributions of photographs.

Please Note: Each school and workplace, in Central Okanagan Public Schools, is on a journey towards equity.
This report reflects only some of the work being done in each of the goal areas.

Edited by Ann Bell, Lake Country Native Association,
and Yvonne Hildebrandt, Executive Assistant - Deputy Superintendent's Office.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action for Truth and Reconciliation

Our Fourth Year 2023-2024

Way' [Hello] everyone,

We are excited to share with you the Central Okanagan Public School's Equity in Action Agreement for Truth and Reconciliation Fourth Annual Report. We continue to focus on the goals and priorities of the District's Equity in Action Agreement (2020-2025) with an unwavering commitment to the belief that:

Equity empowers each learner to thrive, holistically.

Throughout this report, you will read about our collective efforts (the District's Indigenous Education Council, Central Okanagan Public Schools, local Indigenous communities, families/caregivers, and community partners) to ensure our Indigenous learners are at the heart of all we do. Some of this year's highlights include a grade 12 Métis student (selected as Canada's student representative) to present on climate change in Dubai; two grade 5 students presenting their classroom's guide titled: What We Wish Every Canadian Knew at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, in Winnipeg, as the national winners of the Imagine a Canada Project for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation; and, a plethora of Indigenous leadership opportunities where Indigenous students (at all grade levels) have presented their learning, beliefs, hopes and dreams at District forums, post-secondary events, and provincial conferences. Setting the conditions for student agency - for students to feel seen and heard - is contributing to Indigenous students feeling a deeper sense of belonging and cultural pride.

During the 2023-2024 school year, we are incredibly grateful to the District's Indigenous Education Department staff (75 strong) who provided exceptional supports and services to our 3,169 Indigenous learners (Kindergarten to Grade 12), led by Anne Tenning, Jesse Bruce, April Strickland and Christie Russell.

As we begin to embark on the 2024-2025 school year, please walk alongside us to reach the goals and learning priorities we believe will bring us closer to reconciliation.

Limlɛmt to all involved in upholding reconciliation practices in Central Okanagan Public Schools.

Sincerely,



Kevin Kaardal
Superintendent of Schools/CEO



Terry-Lee Beaudry
Deputy Superintendent of Schools

Central Okanagan Public Schools and the District's Indigenous Education Council acknowledge and honour the traditional territory and history of the Okanagan (syilx) People and Westbank First Nation as our host band. We also acknowledge the traditional teachings of all our Elders and the wisdom of their Indigenous culture.

EQUITY IN ACTION AGREEMENT IS BETWEEN

Central Okanagan Public Schools

AND

Westbank First Nation, the Okanagan Indian Band, Okanagan Nation Alliance, Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society, Lake Country Native Association, Kelowna Métis Association, Indigenous Parent and Family Education Council

AND

The Ministry of Education in the Province of British Columbia



Central Okanagan Public Schools

How Are Our Indigenous Learners Doing?

Central Okanagan Public Schools is committed to the ongoing gathering of data to determine how each Indigenous learner is doing (K-12). Total enrolled were:

- 1,388 Elementary School Learners
- 791 Middle School Learners
- 1,166 Secondary School Learners

Through conversations, collections of learning evidence, locally-developed assessments, and Ministry of Education and Child Care data collection, we learn more about each learner and where they are in their learning journey at a given time.

A thoughtful approach to data collection and interpretation is reflected in the words below:

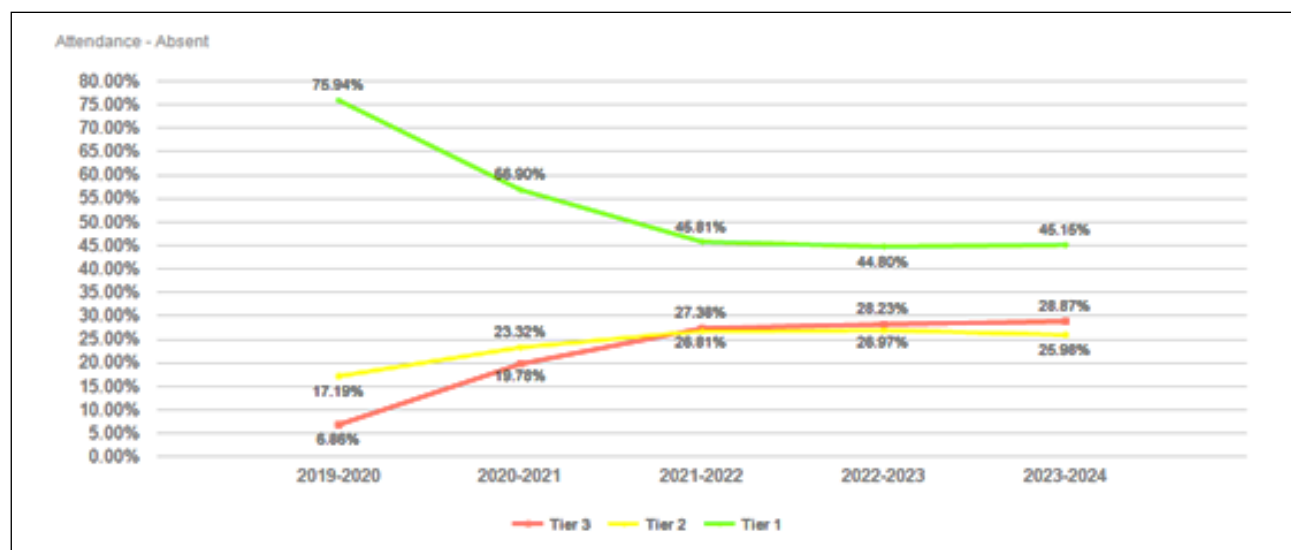
"Data is another form of story. Both quantitative and qualitative data are types of stories that we need to become familiar with to address inequity in education. Knowing our learners' stories is how we ensure we are meeting their needs. It reminds us that we need to create learning environments that respond to the real children and youth we serve. But to see the fuller picture of how our system is responding to an individual learner's needs, we need both an understanding of that learner's story and quantitative data (such as graduation rates and large-scale standardized assessments)."

Jo Chrona, Wayi wah!, Indigenous Pedagogies
An Act for Reconciliation and Anti-Racist Education

Qualitative data is continually sought through talking circles, meetings with parents, community members, and collaborative discussions between Indigenous Education staff, classroom teachers, and School-Based Teams. Additionally, the locally-developed Indigenous Information Management System (IIMS) enables the Indigenous Education staff to input data related to each Indigenous student's intellectual achievement, emotional well-being, cultural connectedness, and physical well-being. Indigenous Student Advocates are required to input student data each day to ensure meaningful connections are being made with each Indigenous student in the District.

Attendance: Indigenous Trends over Time

Consistent attendance for Indigenous learners (K-12) continues to be a focus. The graph below shows the patterns of attendance over the past few years.



Legend

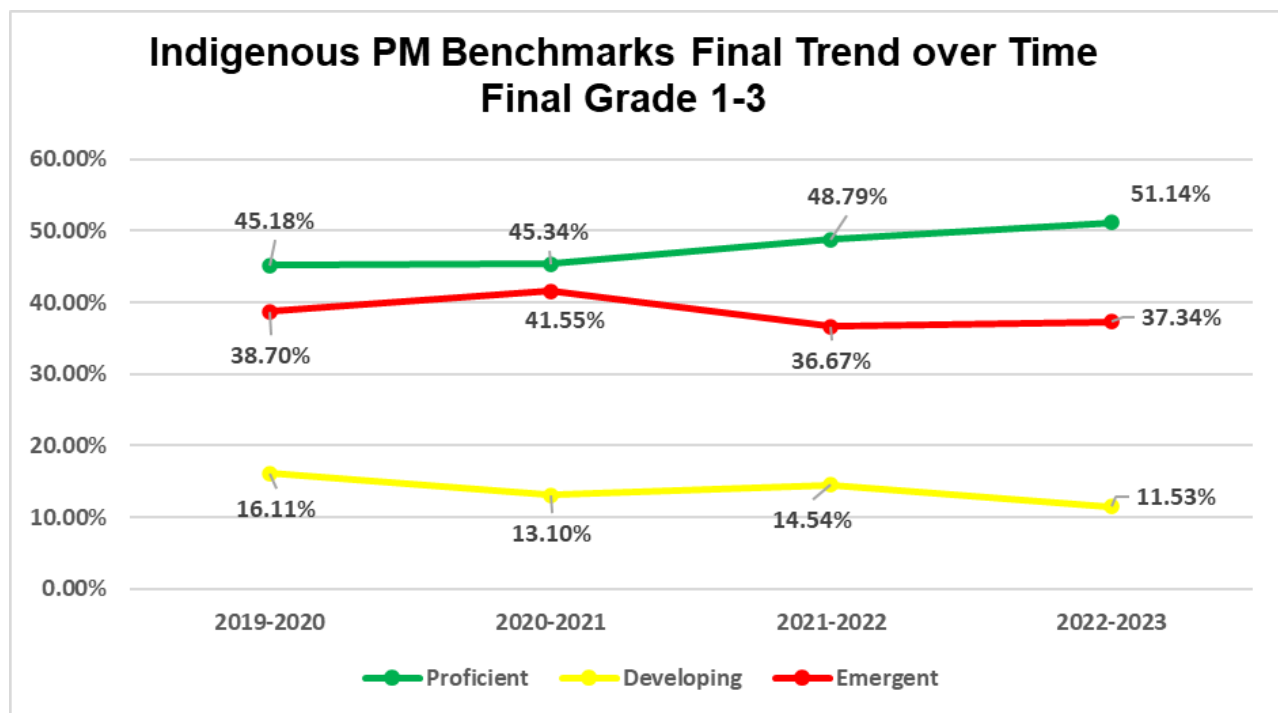
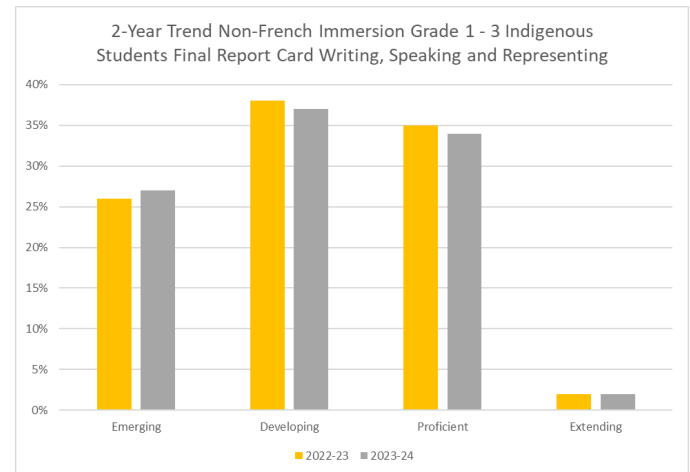
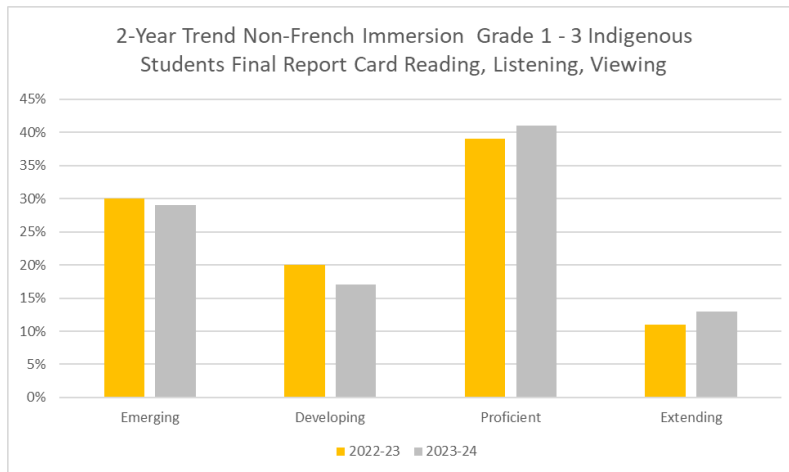
Green: 45% of Indigenous students demonstrating consistent attendance
Yellow: 29% of Indigenous students demonstrating inconsistent attendance
Red: 26% of Indigenous students demonstrating significant absence

Central Okanagan Public Schools

How Are Our Indigenous Learners Doing?

Primary Reading Performance

Central Okanagan Public Schools collection of early learning data shows reading readiness for Indigenous Early Learners during the pandemic. Recognizing the trending up of Indigenous Early Learners not yet meeting expectations at the end of grade three, a number of supports and services, including Early Learning Teacher Consultants and Jordan's Principle supports, have been put in place. The most recent year end data is reflecting a more positive trend in achievement data. Early learning will continue to be a focus in the years ahead.



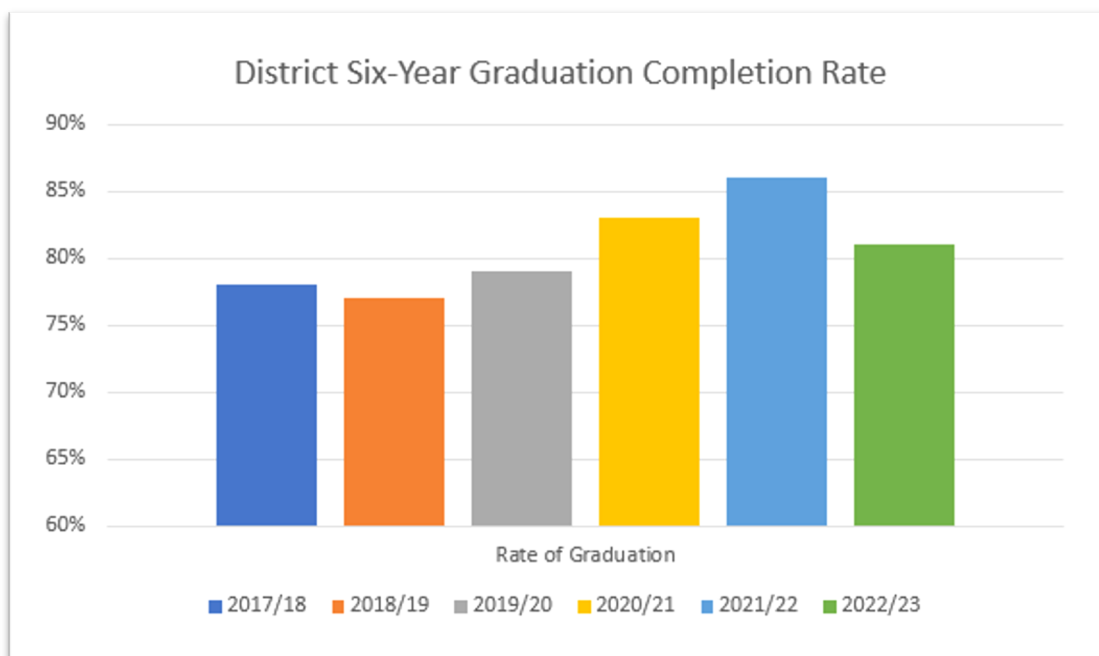
Please refer to the Ministry of Education & Child Care's link:
["How Are We Doing?" Report for all Indigenous student achievement results.](#)



Central Okanagan Public Schools

How Are Our Indigenous Learners Doing?

DISTRICT SIX-YEAR COMPLETION RATE: 2017/18 - 2022/23

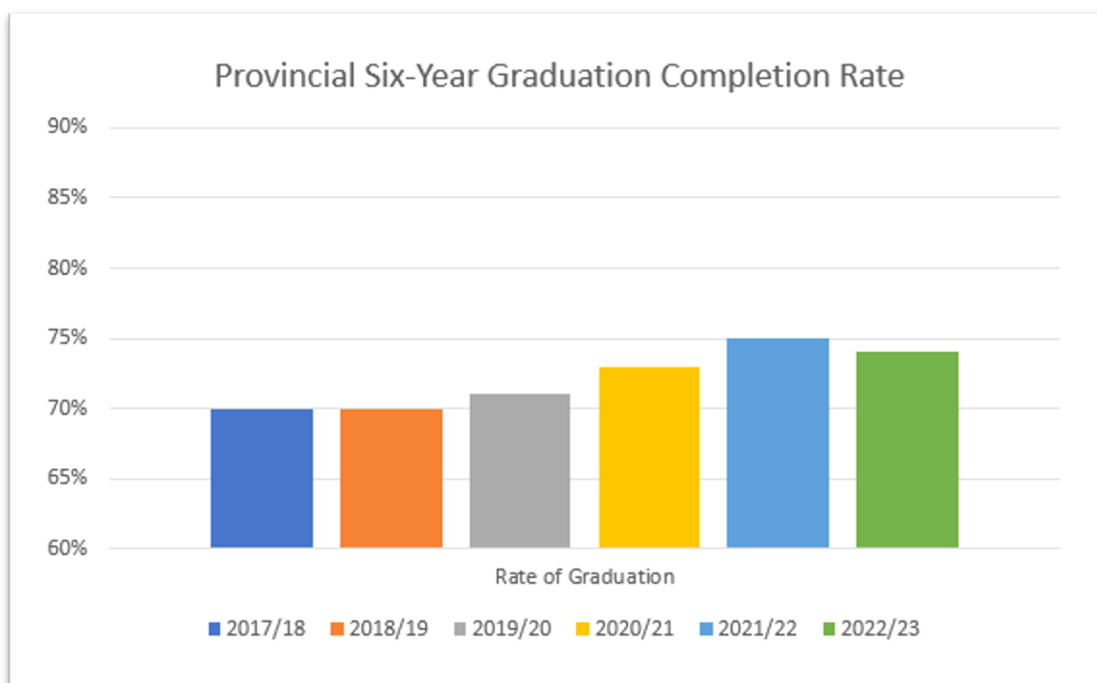


In 2023, the District's six-year completion rate was **82%**, remaining significantly above the provincial six-year completion rate.

The six-year completion rate is the percent of grade 8 students who graduate, with a BC Certificate of Graduation ("Dogwood") or a BC Adult Graduation Diploma ("Adult Dogwood"), within six years from the first time they enroll in grade 8, adjusted for migration in and out of BC. It is not the inverse of a "dropout rate" as students may graduate after the six-year period.

We remain committed to providing equitable learning opportunities that enable each Indigenous grade 12 student to graduate with dignity, purpose and options.

PROVINCIAL SIX-YEAR COMPLETION RATE: 2017/18 - 2022/23



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - District Responsibilities 2020 - 2025

The following outlines the progress towards goals and priorities of the current Equity in Action Agreement

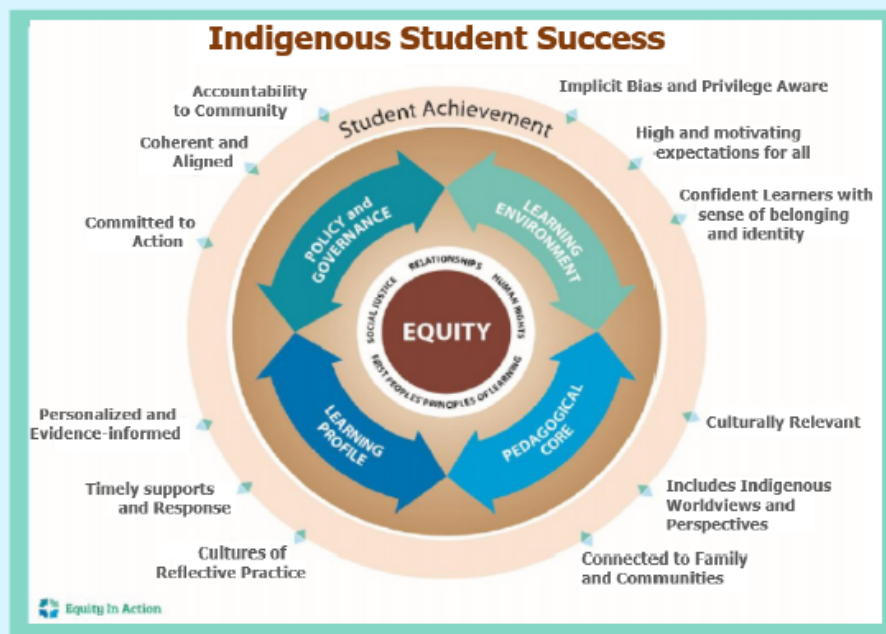
■ EXTENDING ■ DEVELOPING ■ EMERGING

Policy and Governance

- Maintain a District Multi-year Equity Committee ■
- Request the Board of Education review policies to support equity ■
- Request the Superintendent to review administrative procedures to support equity ■
- Provide annual reports on the goals of the Equity in Action Agreement ■

Learning Environment (School Culture)

- Implement and expand Elders in Residence programs, ensuring access to Elder wisdom ■
- Reflect a strong culturally-appropriate Indigenous presence in each school ■
- Ensure quality, culturally relevant space or Gathering Rooms in every school ■



Learning Profiles

- Continue to develop a holistic definition of success for each learner, with a focus on personalizing the learning journey ■
- Develop a timely response plan for 5th & 6th year, Grade 12 and year after Grade 12 ■
- Collaborate to implement culturally responsive interventions and alternatives to suspension ■

Pedagogical Core

- Embed Truth & Reconciliation in teaching and learning K-12 ■
- Ensure Indigenous worldviews are incorporated into classrooms and embedded into school culture ■
- Create understanding with ALL students through authentic Indigenous presence ■
- Continue to foster partnerships between Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and non Indigenous educators through reciprocal learning opportunities ■
- Continue to foster community relationships through ongoing collaboration ■
- Incorporate culturally relevant land-based learning for all students ■

EACH SCHOOL'S JOURNEY TOWARDS EQUITY WILL BE EMBEDDED WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY LEARNING PLAN, UPDATED REGULARLY AND SHARED WITH PARENTS. ■

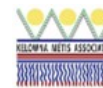
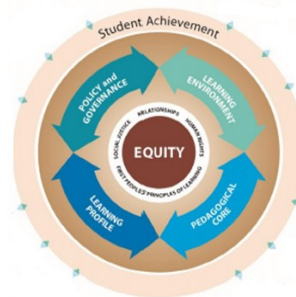
Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Policy and Governance

Central Okanagan Public Schools Indigenous Education Council

In July 2024, the Ministry of Education and Child Care announced legislative amendments requiring all school districts in British Columbia to form an Indigenous Education Council (IEC). The legislative amendments to the School Act, along with a Ministerial Order and new Indigenous Education Council policy, were co-developed by the Ministry of Education and Childcare and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) to support effective implementation of Indigenous Education Councils. Central Okanagan Public Schools celebrates our long-standing relationships in community and recognizes the contributions of our IEC, which has been partnering with the District for over 20 years. Indigenous Education Councils have several key purposes:

- Advocate for all Indigenous students through advice on programs, services, and achievement
- Advise on integration of Indigenous worldviews and perspectives, particularly local First Nations
- Local First Nation members advising on their distinct languages, cultures, customs, traditions, practices, and histories
- Advise on grants provided in relation to Indigenous students



Standing: Brad Dahl, Jesse Bruce, Ashley Power, Yvonne Hildebrandt, April Strickland, Christie Russell, Ann Bell, Elder Bill McKenna
Seated: Chantelle Desrosiers, Kevin Kaardal, Nicole Werstuik, Jordan Coble, Terry Beaudry, Julia Fraser
Missing: Elder Grouse Barnes, Denise Clough, Allan Louis, Rachel Marchand, Edna Terbasket

New legislation clarifies that IEC's are not committees of the Board and requires IEC approval of Indigenous Education targeted funding. Currently, IEC representatives reflect our local Indigenous student population, including members from Westbank First Nation, Okanagan Indian Band, Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society, Kelowna Métis Association, and Lake Country Native Association.

This year, a significant part of the Indigenous Education Council's work was to enact Bill 40 – First Nations Schools of Choice, which sets out a process for First Nations to designate a school of choice for those First Nation students living on-reserve, self-governing First Nation lands, or Treaty Lands. In doing so, the District's Enrolment Policy was updated to align with the Ministry mandate. Specifically, for families to self-identify students with Indigenous Ancestry from Canada.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Policy and Governance

Local Education Agreement

Westbank First Nation (WFN) and the Central Okanagan Board of Education believe that the negotiation and adoption of a Local Education Agreement (LEA) provides a significant opportunity to come together to focus on ways to improve educational outcomes for WFN students, while fostering the relationship necessary to accomplish mutual goals and respond to equitable opportunities to support the unique needs of WFN students and families. Central Okanagan Public Schools' Board of Education and WFN continue to walk hand in hand to carry out the co-designed Terms of Reference and shared responsibilities outlined in the eighth Local Education Agreement. The LEA Oversight Team focuses on the attributes and priorities of the District's Strategic Plan which are also reflected in the LEA Terms of Reference.

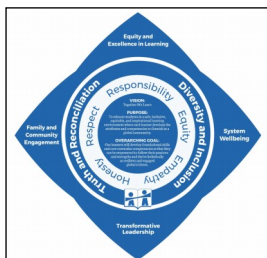


Board Interchange Committee L-R:

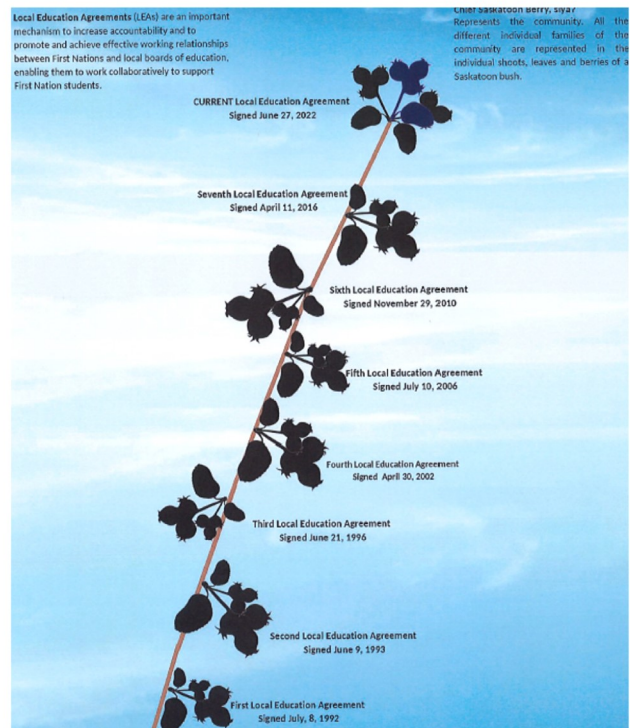
Delta Carmichael, Sara Tronson, Angie Derrickson, Val Johnson, Nicole Werstuik, Kevin Kaardal, Julia Fraser, Wayne Broughton, Chief Robert Louie, Terry Beaudry, Andrea Alexander, Chantelle Desrosiers, Lee-Ann Tiede, Jordan Coble, Jesse Bruce, Chris Alexander

Board Interchange

Each year, Westbank First Nation (WFN) Chief and Council and the Board of Education meet to review the commitments of the Local Education Agreement, celebrate student achievement, and reflect on how to improve support to WFN students. The overarching commitment between WFN and the Board is to uphold the belief that each WFN student can excel and achieve high educational standards. This commitment is reflected in the outstanding graduation rates of WFN students.



Central Okanagan Public Schools
District Strategic Plan link is [here](#).

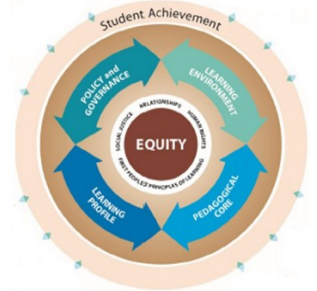


Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Policy and Governance

Bill 40

The Province of British Columbia's School Amendment Act (2023) includes new First Nation School of Choice provisions that set out a process for First Nations to choose which school First Nation students, who live on-reserve, self-governing First Nation lands, or Treaty Lands, will attend. Bill 40 ensures that Westbank First Nation and Okanagan Indian Band can designate an elementary, middle, and secondary school for their students. Further, Bill 40 ensures that First Nations will not have to negotiate this with the Board of Education. The new legislation aligns with the District's commitment to Equity in Action for Truth and Reconciliation. Previously, First Nations were not considered when school districts were created and catchment areas designated. School of Choice legislation is a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action and British Columbia's Tripartite Agreement. Locally, to enact Bill 40 - Schools of Choice, District staff consulted with the Local Education Agreement Oversight Committee on January 18, 2024, and the Indigenous Education Council on January 23, 2024. Subsequently, Westbank First Nation conducted an internal process to determine Schools of Choice for First Nations students living on-reserve. On March 26, 2024, WFN confirmed Chief Tomat Elementary, Constable Neil Bruce Middle School, and Mount Boucherie Secondary School as their schools of choice. *The District continues to consult with Okanagan Indian Band Chief and Council to determine their school of choice.*



Enrolment Policy

The District's Enrolment Application has been updated to reflect the Bill 40 mandates and align with the new Schools of Choice legislation. To update the Enrolment Application, District Staff engaged in inter-departmental collaboration and consulted the Indigenous Education Council to ensure that parents/caregivers can now identify as living On or Off Reserve, and as a registered member of a local First Nation, Westbank First Nation or Okanagan Indian Band. For example:

Indigenous Ancestry from Canada

Does this student have Indigenous ancestry from Canada?

Yes No

Indigenous Affiliation

Inuit Métis Status Non-Status

Is this student a registered member of a local First Nation
(Westbank First Nation or Okanagan Indian Band)?

WFN OKIB No

Does this student live On or Off Reserve?

On Reserve Off Reserve

Do you want your child to be involved in the District's
Indigenous Education Program?

Yes No

The Central Okanagan Public Schools Indigenous Education Program provides services to students of Indigenous ancestry to enhance their school experience. An Indigenous student is someone who self identifies as being of Indigenous ancestry (First Nations, status and non-status, Inuit and Métis) from Canada not the United States or other jurisdictions.

Only the student, parent or caregiver can "self-identify," not Bands or district staff.

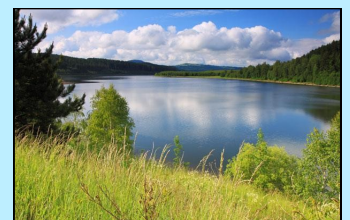
The Indigenous Education Program includes opportunities for:

- Indigenous Student Advocate support at elementary, middle, and secondary schools
- Academic advising, coaching, and support
- Cultural teachings/gatherings/events
- Personal and emotional support
- Liaising with parents, caregivers, and community agencies
- Career Planning
- Goal Setting
- Nsyilxcen (Okanagan) Language

My Land Acknowledgement

By Maia Gray, grade 5

Hello my name is Maia Gray and my ancestors are from Ireland. I would like to acknowledge the existence of the Indigenous Peoples by acknowledging that we are on the traditional land of the syilx in this place known today as Okanagan Valley. I appreciate this place because of how healthy and beautiful most of it looks. I would appreciate it if there were less fires hurting and damaging the land. I am grateful for the life land gives us. For example, land has trees that give us oxygen to breathe and live. I commit to sparing as much water as I possibly can. I chose this because we take things like water for granted and soon there won't be a lot of clean water left without a sort of chemical in it. My promise is to use water wisely and not waste water I don't need.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Learning Environment

Partnership with s̓ənsisyustən House of Learning

For the 2023-24 academic year, Constable Neil Bruce Middle School embarked on a transformative journey centered around the powerful theme of Connect, Nurture, and Belonging. This guiding principle became the cornerstone of our educational approach, encapsulating our commitment to ensuring every learner felt deeply connected to our school and its staff, nurtured in their academic growth, and embraced a profound sense of belonging within the CNB community.



Throughout the year, the dedicated staff at CNB took deliberate actions to breathe life into this theme, making it more than just a slogan but a lived reality for all our students. One particularly impactful initiative focused on fostering connections with our incoming Indigenous students and their families through a meaningful partnership with s̓ənsisyustən.

Originating from genuine friendships between CNB's leadership and members of the s̓ənsisyustən community, this partnership blossomed into a beautiful collaboration. It began with an invitation to attend the Friday morning school community breakfast and participate in the traditional start-of-day circle at s̓ənsisyustən. What started as a simple gesture evolved into a cherished ritual, with CNB's leadership team and staff eagerly joining in every week.

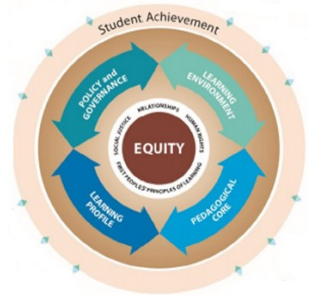
The primary aim was to establish trust and familiarity, ensuring that s̓ənsisyustən students and families viewed CNB as a safe and welcoming environment. Recognizing the challenges many students face transitioning from a smaller school to CNB's larger campus, we sought to provide reassurance and support through these interactions. Yet, the impact of this initiative exceeded our expectations. Inspired by the Indigenous practices witnessed at s̓ənsisyustən, many CNB staff members chose to integrate

similar teachings into their own classrooms, enriching the educational experience for all local learners. This infusion of Indigenous wisdom not only enhanced cultural understanding but also strengthened the sense of connection and belonging within our school community.

Moreover, the visits to s̓ənsisyustən sparked meaningful conversations among CNB educators, fostering a deeper appreciation for Indigenous protocols, traditions, and teachings. From witnessing syilx prayers to embracing drumming songs, these exchanges enriched our collective understanding and fostered a culture of mutual respect and appreciation.

As a community of learners, we take great pride in the profound relationship forged with s̓ənsisyustən and the invaluable learning experiences it has afforded us. Together, we continue to strive towards creating an inclusive, nurturing, and deeply connected educational environment where every individual feels valued and supported on their journey.

Submitted by
Brad Kuhn, Principal, CNB

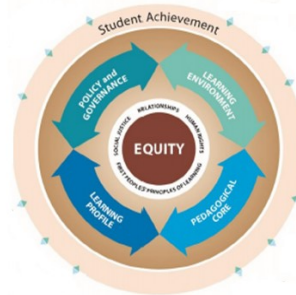


Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Pedagogical Core

We Believe:

- Reimagining teaching and learning with a shared responsibility for inspiring social justice, equity and understanding truths reflects our commitment to reconciliation.
- Integration of Indigenous worldviews and perspectives and First Peoples Principles of Learning are at the core of instruction, assessment and learning.
- Incorporation of local culturally relevant curriculum builds understanding with ALL children through an authentic Indigenous presence.



What We Are Doing:

Central Okanagan School's District motto, *Together We Learn*, reflects a longstanding culture of collaborative professionalism among educators in the District's 50 schools. The enactment of the District's involvement in UB-C's Okanagan School of Education's five-year SSHRC project, *Co-curricular Making: Honouring Indigenous Connections to Land, Culture, and the Relational Self* has brought new un/decolonized meaning to learning together.

A trifactor approach, involving Elders and the local Indigenous communities, over 100 educators, and academic researchers, set the conditions for learning to take place with Indigenous communities, in Indigenous communities, and on the land. The result. Co-curricular making that is shifting pedagogy in classrooms, transforming Indigenous student empowerment, and igniting self-awareness and self-reflective practices. Additionally, teams of educators, from elementary and middle schools, alongside the District's Instructional Leadership Team and District staff, participated in IndigenEYEZ learning, bringing the teachings and culture of kinSHIFT schools to their communities. Across the District's 50 schools, there is profound evidence of reconcili-ACTION, embedding decolonized approaches to learning within classrooms (K-12), launching new Indigenous coursework, celebrating Indigenous role models, demonstrating advocacy and respect for National Truth and Reconciliation Day (Orange Shirt Day), the Moosehide Campaign, the Red Dress Project, National Indigenous peoples Day as well as involvement in the local SIYA and community events. As we continue to learn from local Rightsholders, we continue to shift pedagogy, locating space for equity, and empowering all learners to thrive, holistically.

"This way of learning has not only opened up our thinking on how to decolonize learning practices – it has made us become more aware of our relational self and even shifted some of our habitual ways of being".

(SSHRC Participant)

"I am walking differently through the world relating to water on a daily basis. Treating water as a sacred life force, mentor, teacher, sibling, wise Elder, and future ancestor."

(SSHRC Participant)



The theme capturing our learning this year was "Wonder," which is translated in nsyilxcən as 'seeking collective wisdom.' You can view the video of Dr. Bill Cohen sharing nsyilxcən [here](#).

Professional Standards for BC Educators

The 9th Standard of the Professional Standards for BC Educators explicitly states that educators are to respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and the future. Educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation and healing. Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories, and cultures of First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

You can view the video created by the Ministry of Education and Child Care which affirms the intention and requirements of this standard [here](#) in this link.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Pedagogical Core

Fostering Leadership and Community through IndigenEYEZ

Led by Kelly Terbasket, Anni Phillips and Kim Russell of IndigenEYEZ, teams of educators from Black Mountain Elementary, Pearson Road Elementary, Rose Valley Elementary, Rutland Middle School, alongside the Early Learning Team and the Instructional Leadership Team were offered a unique opportunity to deepen their understanding of equity through a series of transformative learning sessions.

The KinSHIFT sessions provided a rich tapestry of knowledge and insights, deeply rooted in syilx ways of knowing and being. Participants engaged in activities that highlighted the interconnectedness of all things, *snaqsilx*^w (sharing one skin), fostering a holistic understanding of their roles as educators and leaders. The grounding rhythm activities and guided visualizations helped participants connect with ancestral wisdom and envision a future where their actions positively impact generations to come. Non-verbal movements and the “Yes, let’s!” activities energized the group, promoting a positive and supportive environment. These activities not

only fostered collaboration and creativity, but also emphasized the importance of physical presence and embodiment in the learning process. By engaging in movement-based exercises, participants experienced the benefits of holistic education that nurtures the mind, body, and spirit. By exploring complex topics such as decolonization and inclusion through storytelling and collaborative discussions, participants gained a deeper appreciation of the systemic changes needed in education.



Portrait of a Learner:
Qualities and Characteristics
of a Graduate



These powerful sessions emphasized the importance of taking risks together, highlighting that collective action is essential for meaningful change. The shared experiences and reflections strengthened the bonds within teams, fostering a culture of mutual support and shared leadership. These educators have brought these teachings into practice within their own schools from decolonizing learning in math, to bringing *capitak*^w to staff learning, to spending an entire week on the land with students, to having students being nationally recognized for their vision of reconciliation, to humbly share their insights at the SSHRC Working the Ideas Round Table Forum. By contributing their experiences and practices, educators have enriched the broader dialogue on equity and collective efficacy in education. When we come together with heartfelt intention and respect, we have the collective power to create meaningful and lasting change in our school communities.



At a debriefing on June 6, 2024, school staff, teacher consultants, and senior educational leaders reflected on their learning as documented in the image above.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Pedagogical Core

SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council)

I had the opportunity to truly witness reconcili-ACTION taking place as part of the Working the Ideas SSHRC Forum II Roundtable Conversations. I was impressed with the energy and pride of all who presented, utilizing traditional Indigenous Knowledges and the First Peoples Principles of Learning to learn on the land or have conversations in circle. I was honoured to hear the Elders share their wisdom and hope for the practices they were seeing presented as we journey together towards Truth and Reconciliation. I thank the event organizers for providing an opportunity to celebrate the learning that has occurred in so many of our schools. Thank you to all admin, teachers, and students who facilitated roundtable discussions (see the last page of the Newsletter for the Working the Ideas Program).

Submitted by Kevin Kaardal, Superintendent/CEO of Schools



QR link to
Forum Program

Working the Ideas: **The Lived Terms of Curricular (Un)Decolonizing and Indigenizing**

Margaret Macintyre Latta
Okanagan School of Education,
Faculty of Education, UBC

Over 100 Central Okanagan Public School participants, in the multi-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Partnership Grant, continue to individually/collectively pursue curricular pathways for reconceptualizing education in ways that honour Indigenous histories with pedagogies responsive to the relational connections to land, culture, and understandings of self in the world. This reckoning and reimagining work alongside prospective and practicing Indigenous and non-indigenous educators, positions all involved to invest in the lived terms of (un)decolonizing curricular efforts.

Investing in the lived terms of curricular (un)decolonizing and Indigenizing becomes the shared purpose of our partnership. Educators' need to practice negotiating the complexities of reconciling conversations with their students, colleagues, and extended communities. The May 1, 2024, *Working the Ideas Forum II* (pictured here) is one pathway, bringing educators from across multiple disciplines and interests together to share the lived terms encountered and negotiated through **co-curricular-making**. In doing so, the varied Intersectionalities comprising the "co" in co-curricular-making, including cultural, racial, ecological, gendered, social, and emotional considerations, are made visible. Building on the previous year's *Working the Ideas Forum I*, the significances for learners/learning are increasingly identified, explicating and inspiring transformation and reconciliation, given the particulars of educative sites/situations. A participatory spirit undergirds these efforts, inciting unforeseen curricular connections as educators work the ideas, reckoning with values, assumptions and beliefs and reimagining their own practices.

The inquiry process and associated discourse structure of the Forum is purposefully designed to promote continuous communication, foster collaborative participation and relational accountability, ensure substantive guidance and facilitation from Syilx Elders/Knowledge Keepers, and mediate challenges and problems as they arise. Specifically, the opportunity to engage in shared sense-making experiences afforded by such practice ground invests further in mobilizing educators' decolonizing curricular habits and practices within their school communities.



See QR above to SSHRC
UBC Co-Curricular Grant Project
or click link [here](#)

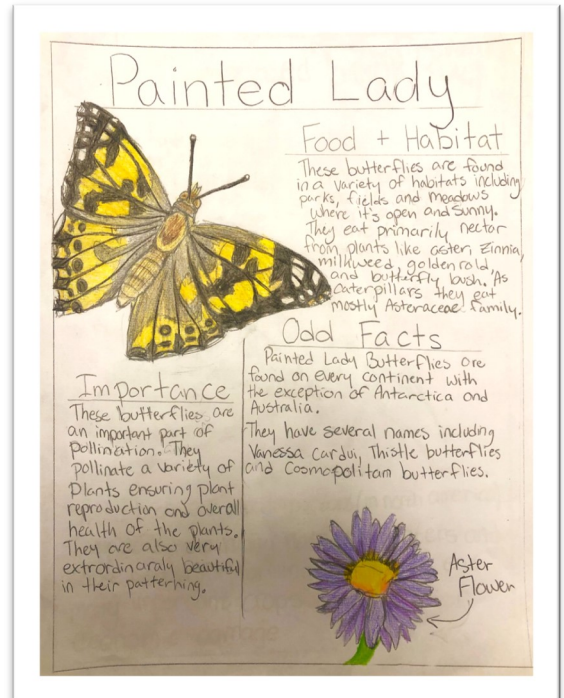


Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Pedagogical Core

Twenty one years ago, I taught the very first Indigenous Visual Art class. The intent was, and still is, to honour Indigenous culture through visual art. You can think of a nation's visual art as the cover to the book of that nation. It is what we see first, what we connect with and what welcomes us to connect more.

This course is open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students at Mount Boucherie Secondary School (MBSS). It has always been my hope for our Indigenous students to see their culture and themselves represented in their schools. It has been my hope that non-Indigenous students will connect and honour the Indigenous culture by connecting through visual art. Visual art, by its very nature, is a deeply personal expression. Once a student has learned and honoured a nation through visual art, they connect to that nation in a long-lasting way. Each and every chapter of learning has culture and people at the forefront; the art is simply the vehicle that ties everything together. We always start the course with the syilx Okanagan nation. *capitk'wł*, language and people lead the learning about traditional art forms and then we explore how, why and what current syilx artists are creating. As well, the land and historic and current issues are tied to the learning process. This pattern of learning is repeated with other nations as we spread out from the syilx territory, always referencing the syilx nation for comparative learning.



Gracie Isaac shared what this art class meant to her in an era of truth and reconciliation.

As often as possible, guest artists are brought in to share their knowledge first hand. We had a syilx artist work with our students, collaborating on ideas, learning the art process, connecting to *capitk'wł*, all the while painting alongside the artist.

This course is now an Indigenous Graduation Credit from the Ministry of Education and Child Care. The course has grown from one block per year at Mount Boucherie Secondary to four blocks this coming year. Even better, the course will expand to Okanagan Mission Secondary School and Rutland Secondary School in September 2024!

In January 2024, I hosted a Presentation of Learning at MBSS. We had WFN Elders, politicians from the community, officials from other school districts, our own district staff, and many more community members. The most important guests were the students themselves, who had the opportunity to share their experiences in the class after the formal presentation. Many great conversations took place!

It is my hope that this course continues to grow at other schools and expand out to even more schools. As proud of this course as I am, it belongs, with gratitude, to all of the students that have taken this class over the years and helped shape it into what it is today and what it will be in the future. With gratitude to school and district leaders that have created a setting where a course like this can not only exist, but a setting where it is honoured and can flourish. And my deepest gratitude to the Elders, artists, and cultural leaders from so many Indigenous nations; they are my teachers! way' limlɔmt

Submitted by Jim Elwood, Artist; Art Educator
Mount Boucherie Secondary School



Indigenous Visual Arts 12
Presentation of Learning to WFN Elders,
community politicians and members, district staff,
as well as out of district staff

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Pedagogical Core

Imagine a Canada Project

National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation



On May 31st, grade 5 students Teegen Burroughs and Cade Flower, along with their families, travelled to Winnipeg to receive an award on behalf of the 27 children in their learning community. Together, the 10 and 11 year olds at Black Mountain Elementary wrote and submitted a book titled *'A Guide to What We Wish Every Canadian Knew'* for the Imagine a Canada Project of the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation. Out of hundreds of applications across the country, these children's words were selected to be recognized and honoured at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

As the children themselves have articulated, this experience was not about one project or one submission, but it was the thoughtful and meaningful accumulation of all the learning they have engaged with over the past year (and more). They have learned from, and alongside, syilx Elders, Elder Mo, Elder Pamela, and Elder Grouse, experienced *captik^{wl}* as shared by Knowledge Keepers including Coralee Miller and Anona Kampe, virtually toured the Kamloops Residential School with Jackie Jules, an intergenerational survivor, and engaged in Land-Based Learning with the other grade 5 communities at Black Mountain Elementary and grade 8s from Rutland Middle School, and truly began to consider what it means for them to live here, on syilx land, with all the history this land holds before and after colonization.



Students engage in Land-Based Learning with a commitment to Truth and Reconciliation



Teegen, Cade, Keely and Janet attending the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

The educators who serve them had the gift of participating in the SSHRC research project, as well as learning from Kelly Terbasket and her team in ongoing IndigenEYEZ sessions this year. Their submission set out to honour the story of this land and Canada as they are coming to know it, as well as their hopes and dreams for a reconciled future. They divided their Guide into 4 sections: What it Was, What it Became, What it is Now, and What it Could Be. It was important to them that they started with syilx culture and family systems, pre-contact, so they could see just how significant the impacts of colonization were and continue to be. They reckoned with current inequities still faced by Indigenous people today, and many of the children made personal connections to their own lives. And, it was equally important to them that they offer some ideas of how we might move forward as a nation in reconciliation.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Pedagogical Core

Implementation of Indigenous Graduation Credit Courses

Justice Murray Sinclair is quoted as saying "Education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it." With a commitment to reconciliation and in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, this year's Graduates were the first to meet the British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care Indigenous-Focused graduation requirement. Effective the 2023/24 school year, all students working toward a British Columbia Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood Diploma) must complete at least four credits in Indigenous-focused coursework. All of Central Okanagan Public Schools' secondary students had the opportunity to enrol in Indigenous-focused courses to meet this requirement. Across all secondary schools in the district, dozens of English First Peoples courses were offered to thousands of Grade 10, 11, and 12 students. In addition to English First Peoples, other courses that meet the new graduation requirement include BC First Peoples 12, Contemporary Indigenous Studies, and Indigenous Visual Arts 12. Of note, ninety students completed Indigenous Visual Arts at MBSS and the course is now being offered at Okanagan Mission Secondary School and Rutland Secondary School. All graduating students had the opportunity to engage in deep and meaningful learning as we journey together towards reconciliation.

Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)

Last year, South Kelowna Elementary teachers, Kymberley Jennejohn and Leanne Kirschner, decided to step out of their comfort zone and break free from the confines of their classroom settings and lesson plans. They took their students outside, embracing nature as their new classroom. By listening to their students' interests, connections, and curiosities, together, they crafted personalized and meaningful learning that was driven by the voices of their learners, fostering a deeper connection to both the curriculum and the environment. The students each chose a tree who they visited, wrote poems and told stories to, and engaged in playful learning with them. As a result, they noticed things that were harming the land and their trees such as garbage and waste being disposed in the area. The students had the agency to speak up for

the land and protect it by making signs, raising awareness, and contacting local organizations to come and help clean it up.



My Land Acknowledgement

By Rowan Kang, grade 5

Hello, my name is Rowan Kang and my ancestors are from Punjab, India. I would like to honour the existence of the Indigenous people by acknowledging that we are on the traditional land of the syilx in this place that is known today as Okanagan Valley. I appreciate the Okanagan Valley's good school system because in other places kids are scared to go close to their school and I am happy to go to mine. Also, I appreciate the Okanagan Valley's wonderful big lakes that I can play games in like football or I can swim in. I also appreciate the plants I can grow in my backyard without them dying because in other countries the plants will just die. Lastly, I appreciate the forest that I can go into and play games in like hide and seek or sword fights. I am grateful to the land for giving me fresh air to breathe in and for the fields that I can play football on. I commit every weekend to going out in my backyard and watering the tree which will make the trees behind my house grow more which will make more oxygen. Then that might give later generations more oxygen to breathe.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Pedagogical Core

Advanced Placement Land-Based Inquiry

In 2023-2024, grade 12 students at GES and OKM had an opportunity to learn in a new class called Advanced Placement Land-Based Inquiry. Some of our most important learning experiences were centered around the relationships that we were able to build with syilx Knowledge Keepers who shared their ways of knowing and being with us. We were lucky to be able to meet with Krystal Withakay multiple times throughout the year. Each time we connected, Krystal knew just what teachings to share with us. She knew what our students needed at each moment. After meeting our students in our classrooms, we met with Krystal at a sacred place on Black Mountain. She taught us how to follow our heartbeats as we learned to drum, and we were able to talk about our struggles as we did a tobacco offering and drank traditional teas together. Our students summed it up best by sharing:

Leven: “The experience of running through fields [on Black Mountain], releasing frustrations, and letting nature absorb those emotions underscored the land's role as an emotional companion. I felt especially vulnerable when Krystal discussed the traditional expectations for men to hide their tears, and it made me reflect on the stereotypical ideas of masculinity. Nature, unlike societal expectations, doesn't judge; it accepts you, no matter your emotions.”

Meg: “The story of Black Mountain is a story based upon the Indigenous youth that have come and gone over the hundreds of years prior to colonization. It is a story made up of, probably, hundreds of individuals' stories, where they had confronted their deepest fears. It is a place where white settlers told stories about how the syilx people had ‘left’ their children on the mountain for three days, spreading lies and disrespecting their culture. It is a place where there are no more children crying on the hillside because their culture was forbidden to be practiced, and now that practice is lost. The land holds the stories of the elk that used to travel through there, and the coyote that saw us when we were there. Our story is a part of Black Mountain's too, now. Stories come from people, from their thoughts spoken into words, and it can also come from the animals story, and the land story, and all of these can help shape the story of a culture. That is exactly where Black Mountain's story comes from, and the story of the syilx people.”



Arianna: “Going to Black Mountain with Krystal was such a beautiful experience for me and I wasn't even expecting it. Listening to her talk about the Indigenous ways and customs really fascinated me. I think that her telling her stories about her ancestors and what the differences are to modern day really taught me a lot. It taught me that sometimes we can learn so much from the people that came before us because they experienced the exact same emotions that we do now. I felt really heard and understood when she talked about how it is so difficult to grow up, and how it is so deeply important to feel all the emotions you need to feel. This experience gave me so much more respect and trust in the Indigenous customs and beliefs because I think that there is so much significance, truth, and clarity in their ways of functioning.”

Stevie: “Today was a very hands-on experience where Krystal invited us to learn some private and valued teachings within her culture. I can develop a deeper understanding to cultivate a reciprocal relationship with syilx and all of my more-than-human kin in this place through my actions.”

Sidney: “We all took something different from being with Krystal. She sparked some real conversations. It made me realize the importance of sharing these stories and creating spaces for honest discussions about Indigenous histories. It's not just about learning facts; it's about connecting and appreciating the richness of cultures that might differ from our own.”



We were incredibly lucky to be able to connect with each other and with Krystal throughout the year. The bonds that we built are strong and will not be forgotten. We look forward to continuing to build our relationship with Krystal and many other syilx Elders and Knowledge Keepers this year.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Pedagogical Core

United Nations Climate Change Conference - COP28

Okanagan Mission Secondary School graduate, Erin Work, had the opportunity to attend COP28 last December with the Centre for Global Education's Decarbonize program. She represented the Okanagan, and Canada, in the Blue Zone, where youth had opportunity to speak with ambassadors, delegates, ministers, and other country leaders to demand better climate education for youth, and protection of the land. Upon return, Erin was asked at our District Board meeting what her biggest takeaway was after attending COP28, and she replied, "Hope. Being with such amazing young people from all over the world who are passionate about climate gave me hope."



Words from Erin Work: Last December, I had the privilege of attending the United Nation Climate Conference (COP) in Dubai and I can confidently say it was one of the best experiences of my life. Through travel conferences, people and more I learned about our world, its struggles and its triumphs. Still to this day I use the learning I endured to guide my life and decisions. I always come back to one quote I saw in Dubai: "Our life is measured in the hope and action we inspire, what will your legacy be?"

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - Learning Profiles

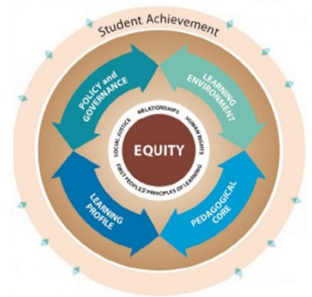
We Believe:

Learner success is achieved through personalized learning, timely supports and culturally relevant interventions.

What We Are Doing:

In the 2023-2024 school year:

- The District continues to develop a definition of success which focuses on the personalized learning journey for Indigenous students. We understand the importance and power of culture and connection and relationship to the land as our teacher. Many opportunities and programs were put in place to respond to Indigenous learners' interests and learning styles, including multiple ways of assessing learning.
- For students with a Ministry Designation, the appropriate District Consultant must be a member of the team assessing and planning for the adjusted schedule. Each Consultant must liaise with the Director of Instruction of Indigenous Education and Equity for Indigenous students being considered for an adjusted school schedule.



Jordan's Principle

Jordan's Principle is named in honour of Jordan River Anderson, a young First Nations child from Norway House Cree Nation in northern Manitoba, who spent his entire life in hospital while caught in a jurisdictional dispute between the governments of Canada and Manitoba. The ongoing dispute prevented Jordan from returning to his home community to receive in-home care. Through advocacy efforts, Jordan's Principle has now become a legal requirement, resulting from the Orders of the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.



From Certified Education Assistant (CEA) support to Classroom Support Teachers to additional funding for assessments, cultural opportunities and learning resources, school teams and community organizations were very successful in receiving over \$525,988 in funding for educational enhancements during the 2023-2024 school year. The following schools received funding: Chief Tomat Elementary, Const. Neil Bruce Middle, Helen Gorman Elementary, Hudson Road Elementary, Pearson Road Elementary, Rutland Elementary, Rose Valley Elementary, South Kelowna Elementary, Springvalley Elementary, and Watson Road Elementary. We continue to implement our District Administrative Procedure to streamline the process for applying to Jordan's Principle for equitable services and support for groups of Indigenous learners. The Inclusive Education Department together with the Indigenous Education Department will continue to work together with school administrators to ensure applications are approved for the upcoming school year.

Between July 2016 and
February 29, 2024

more than

4.58 million

products, services and supports
were approved under



speech
therapy



educational
supports



medical
equipment



mental health
services
and more

For more information on accessing Jordan's Principle funding for supports in Central Okanagan Public Schools, please contact Christie Russell (District Vice-Principal - Indigenous Education). christie.russell@sd23.bc.ca

To view the Admin Procedure, [here](#) is the link.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

The following schools were selected this year to present their School Community Learning Plans.
Each school shared their focus on equity in action.

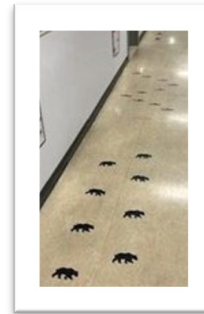
A.S. Matheson Elementary



The Gathering Room/"Nest" Social Emotional Learning regulation space

A.S. Matheson has been engaged in a multi-year spiral of inquiry journey of reflection at all levels. Our work towards reflective practices align with the Core Competencies and is supported by the local story of the Four Food Chiefs. As a staff, we have created and implemented a self-reflection tool for students to use to reflect on themselves as learners and on their growth with the Core Competencies.

Our reflection work through the Four Food Chiefs invites all learners to reflect, connect and develop a sense of belonging within their classroom and greater school community. The Four Food Chiefs allow learners to move between each of the Chiefs throughout different learning experiences. Regardless of



Wellness Path

age, gender, religion and culture, there is space for all learners to see themselves within the story of the Four Food Chiefs.

Many teachers explored collaborative land acknowledgements to connect our actions as learners with reconciliation. Students in grade 6 committed to acting sustainably. They are deepening their learning and understanding around truth and reconciliation by acting within our school and there has been a school-wide impact on sustainability.

Our team has collaborated to re-imagine and bring together the "Nest" (Social Emotional Learning regulation space) and the Indigenous Gathering Space. As the Gathering Room was very small and not conducive to gathering groups of Indigenous students, the Indigenous Student Advocate and Social Emotional Learning Teacher collaborated to bring these spaces together and support our learners in team! All students are benefiting from our new Gathering Space a decolonized learning environment, embedding Indigenous teachings of wellness and self-regulation.

In our work towards equity, here at A.S. Matheson, in our front and back hallway, we have installed a movement path that we are calling the Wellness Path. In collaboration with our District Indigenous Education department, Health Promoting Schools department, Elder Pamela and Grouse Barnes, the Wellness Path has been created for students as a way to connect to self through story, physical movement and self-regulation.



Students using thinking materials supporting core competencies in the Gathering Room/"Nest"

Every Child Matters and the TEAM at A.S. Matheson is dedicated to continuing our journey to Truth and Reconciliation by celebrating and embedding Indigenous worldviews and practices into our routines.

We are committed to learning and reflecting on the past and present to grow together as a community.

Things Aren't the Same

Reflective Writing by

Ronika Nejatifard

Remember the old ice cream shop we used to go to? Well it got burnt down. Everything has changed, everything! Our favourite park is on fire, people are dying! But nobody cares! We don't have a future anymore, we don't have a home. Home is a place where you are safe. We are no longer safe in our homes, we are not safe in our town! Please save some of the earth for us little ones. There are babies, kids and humans who need to live a life too! A very long time ago Indigenous people were warning us about this but we did not care! We took away everything! Their kids, their land, we took away everything. They were taking good care of their land until we took over. We treated them very badly. Some people still treat them badly. But we should respect them because they are still taking good care of our planet. Animals are dying because of us. STOP WASTING. Were the wildfires this bad before? No! Well, we are improving at wasting! If you are saying well I'm too young to do anything. You are wrong. Little small things can make a big difference.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans Focus on Equity

École Bellevue Creek



As we move into our second year at École Bellevue Creek, our team continues our focus "Connection to the land", in the syilx language *tm̓x̌w̓úlaʔx̌w̓*. Our journey on the path towards Truth and Reconciliation began with our team. On Implementation Day last year, we spent the morning at Woodhaven and just like our students, learning from the land and discovering all that the land has to offer. We are very excited about our initiatives that are guiding our learning.



Here are ways we are integrating Indigenous perspectives into our classrooms and community. Our students experienced many field trips to Woodhaven, exploring and appreciating nature. Our grade 2 students are learning about the life cycle of the Kokanee salmon. We have been fortunate to watch the salmon develop, grow and then have the opportunity to release them into Mission Creek.



Traditional Plants". One Indigenous plant that is important and interconnected to the local environment is the arrow leaf balsamroot. This plant is part of our school logo and we are continually learning about its value and importance.

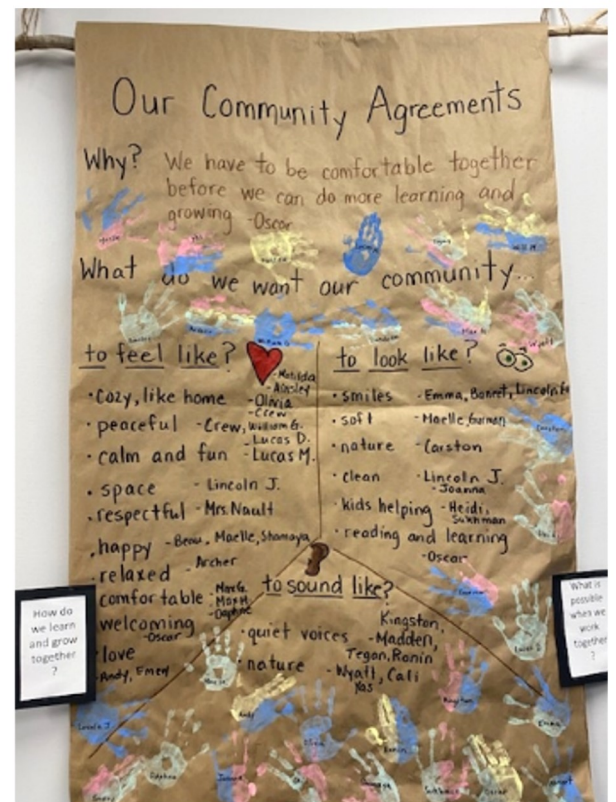
A team of teachers has begun their journey with a Language & Land Based Immersion initiative. Using "Stories of our syilx Ways" they are focusing on French and syilx language development and cultural experiences with nature.

The introduction and reading *Kou~Skelowh We are the People: A Trilogy of Okanagan Legends* is instrumental in developing class communities and teaching children their roles and contributions to our school and class communities. We continue to integrate Indigenous perspectives with the calendar and learning about the 13 moon phases.



This year, we are thrilled to begin a gardening initiative with our students. In collaboration with our Parent Advisory Council, we have garden beds for each class. Making connections to the Four Food Chiefs, our classes have planted vegetables and Indigenous plants and have been so excited to watch the plants growing every day.

We know that learning takes patience and time and we are grateful to be on this journey.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans Focus on Equity

Chute Lake Elementary



At Chute Lake Elementary School, we continue to be committed to the goals and priorities of the Equity in Action Agreement. This commitment includes reflection on the pedagogical core to ensure we are incorporating Indigenous worldviews into classrooms and embedding them into our school culture.

Our daily schedule starts with connection. Intentionally, all students start the day connecting to each other, their teacher, and in some cases the land. Gathering in circle to begin the day is common in all classrooms where they learn such things as how to share thoughts and ideas, and problem solving. Our grade 1 classes eagerly make their way to the forested area to play, explore, and connect to nature before returning to class where they gather in circle.



Chute Lake Elementary recognizes that we live, work, and play as uninvited guests on the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Okanagan syilx people. Our school is surrounded by nature and our students frequently venture out on walking field studies where they delve into intentionally designed learning experiences. Their learning is then brought back into the classroom where the students celebrate and acknowledge the importance of culture, connection, and our relationship to and with the land. For example, our grade 5 community started developing individual

land acknowledgements, with the support of our Indigenous advocate, after their visit to Woodhaven Nature Conservancy.

To conclude a month-long focus on the aspects of student agency (identity, belonging, mastery, and efficacy), which included reading of the books "Stand Tall" and "Be



Students in circle sharing their learning from their month of 'care'.



them. Our learning was also shared with our parent community through our school newsletter.

Chute Lake Elementary School will continue to embed Indigenous Ways of Knowing and First Peoples Principles of Learning into our continued journey towards Truth and Reconciliation, believing that equity empowers all learners to thrive.

Prepared by Benita Crombie, Vice-Principal



Using the book, "Be a Good Ancestor" February focused on care for self, others and the land.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans

Focus on Equity

Ellison Elementary



At Ellison Elementary, we wanted to do more in moving toward Truth and Reconciliation. We welcomed everyone with *kʷu limt p cyʕap* and a land acknowledgement as a part of our daily morning announcements. Our student Advocate was a key member of our community and was often in classes or in our Gathering Room with small groups of students. Every assembly began not just with the land acknowledgement, but also with the singing of the Okanagan song.

On the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation we had a school-wide assembly where we planned to have several short videos and some stories, but when our Indigenous Student Advocate, Amanda Lamothe, spoke and played her flutes. We knew that nothing we had planned could have said it any better. Parents of our Indigenous students who were able to join us commented that it was a very moving assembly.



On Implementation Day, school staff began the day with “I am From” to dig deeper into our privileges. We learned so much about each other and that many of our staff have family members directly affected by years of racism and trauma. We ended the day at the Clubhouse Farm to connect with the land, and to experience the opportunities there for all our children to learn outside.



Our primary students had three opportunities to visit the Clubhouse Farm, and then helped us plan the mud kitchens in our outdoor classrooms. This incredible facility allows us all to decolonize learning and observe the social interactions of children at play. Playing is thinking, and thinking is learning.

With the participation of the District Early Years team, we were fortunate to benefit from a grant from Strengthening Early Years Transitions to Kindergarten. This grant allowed for the purchase of seven garden beds, and to hire a local artist, Ede Axelson, to paint a mural on the shipping container.

The learning will continue as we watch our plants grow.



To launch National Indigenous Peoples Day this year, we gathered on the field in a large circle, had a land acknowledgement, and celebrated all our learning from this wonderful year.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans

Focus on Equity

École Glenrosa Elementary



Way! Hello! As a community at École Glenrosa, we are committed to growing our understanding of Indigenous ways of being and fostering an inclusive environment for all our learners. Some of the ways we are doing this are by working on our own personal land acknowledgments, inviting Indigenous knowledge keepers into our community and being open and responsive to how we are incorporating the First Peoples Principles of Learning into our classrooms.

For Implementation Day, staff spent time outside in our forest classroom reflecting on our own backgrounds and how we became who we are. It was a special day of learning about each other, reciprocity and how we are interconnected with the land. We intentionally build time into our staff meetings to continue the work of writing our own personal land acknowledgments. Several teachers took this back to their classrooms and had their students write and share their acknowledgments during the morning announcements each day.



spaces for our learners to come together and learn traditional crafts like beading, as well as drumming and hoop dancing.

Staff continue to embrace every opportunity to learn about and embed Indigenous content into their classrooms. Starting in circle, spending time outdoors and meeting learners where they are at are common practice at Glenrosa Elementary. Our Indigenous learners have seen improved literacy results through shoulder-to-shoulder support from our Super Reader's program and the addition of our Indigenous Literacy Teacher who provides holistic support where culture is at the heart of learning. Indigenous knowledge keepers have joined us throughout the year to share their stories and wisdom with us. Anona Kampe has spent time in our outdoor learning space to help our community learn from the land and she also shared her traditional knowledge around storytelling with several of our classes.



Our Indigenous youth are continuing to grow their cultural knowledge and love sharing it with the community. We encourage our youth to take leadership roles in creating bulletin boards about Orange Shirt Day, participating in Indigenous games, and drumming and leading our neighbourhood walk on National Indigenous Peoples Day. We acknowledge that this learning is not singular and that it continues to create ripples of learning throughout our community.

"I acknowledge that we are on the unceded traditional territory of the Okanagan syilx people. I am grateful for trees because they let us breathe fresh air. They make me calm and free. I will be a good ancestor by planting more trees and I will come back every day and water them and care for them like a baby."

N.B. Grade 3 student

"It's fun to learn about my culture, about how it works and stuff. I would say it makes me feel fine. I like learning about how it started and stuff."

K.L. Grade 5 student

"I just like that I'm learning about my culture because I'm only a teensy bit Indigenous and I want to learn how to speak it. I really like my teachers that are Indigenous because they help me learn about it more and more. It makes me feel good. It makes me feel proud that I'm in this culture."

S.C. Grade 3 student

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans Focus on Equity



Oyama Traditional School



Grade 2/3 students exploring their connections and appreciation of the land we get to “work, learn and play on”.

In 2004, a proposal was put forward requesting Oyama Elementary School reimagine itself as Oyama Traditional School in hopes it would increase student enrolment preventing possible closure. Twenty years later, staff and students have started a journey looking at this identity and exploring the various perspectives of the term "traditional." One of these perspectives focuses on an understanding, appreciation, and connection to our land acknowledgement that states "we are learning together on the unceded, Traditional Territory of the Okanagan syilx People."

During Implementation Day 2022, staff participated in a water ceremony with Elder Rose Caldwell along the shore

of Wood Lake. This powerful experience on the land inspired a restructuring of our multi-grade schoolhouses our students belong to.

Green House became Land House. Yellow House became Sun House

Red House became Heart House. Blue House became Water House

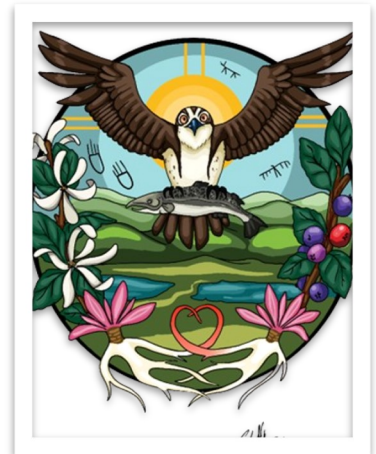


With the support of our Parent Council, we reached out to Coralee Miller, a local Indigenous artist and docent at the Sncəwips Heritage Museum, who created four images that represent the corresponding houses.

In October 2023, we had Coralee Miller come to our school to provide insight on one of our inquiry questions, "what is sacred." We looked at the correlation between the terms "traditional" and "sacred" and how we identify with them as a school community. She then unveiled our new school crest from this land-based perspective. It tells the story of our four houses, showcased on the isthmus we live on, with the teachings of the Four Food Chiefs, using traditional pictographs of eagle and coyote that represent learning and playful youth, that come together as our school community now known as the Oyama Traditional School Osprey. This crest sits side by side with our original crest.

Further efforts to increase our learning and knowledge of Truth and Reconciliation and Equity in Action included lessons and assemblies that recognized Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Ribbon Skirt Day, Red Dress Day, and the Moose Hide Campaign. Embedded in our students reading daily announcements is a welcome to our school in nsyilxcən. Students also proudly sing the Okanagan Song during a number of our assemblies.

The students, staff, and community at Oyama Traditional School are continuing to work on our personal and school identities, and how we authentically belong together in a community that has a deep connection to the land, water, sun, and the heart of those who live, work, learn, and play. We are incredibly fortunate as we get to do this practically, often learning outside on the beautiful land we call home.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans

Focus on Equity

Pearson Road Elementary



Pearson Road Elementary students and staff are deeply committed to equity for Indigenous learners by decolonizing our school and classroom cultures through Indigenous teachings and learnings. We have such gratitude to be visitors on the beautiful unceded and ancestral lands of the Okanagan people. Being able to live, learn, and thrive on this territory motivates us to leave the land and our learning better than we found it.

Indigenous teachings and *nsyilxcən* language can be found throughout our school, our Indigenous Garden, and our outdoor classroom. With the support of our Indigenous Advocate, we participate in many cultural events including National Indigenous Peoples Day, Primary Winter Gathering, Orange Shirt Day, Harmony Day, and have welcomed numerous cultural presenters from our District team and beyond. We also routinely have

students open all gatherings with a personal Land Acknowledgement prior to our singing of the Okanagan Song.

This year, we were thrilled to be invited to participate in an IndigenEYEZ opportunity: kinSHIFT in the Classroom. KinSHIFT is an "experiential training program that teaches educators strategies and techniques to breathe life into Indigenous principles and values, shift their classroom culture and strengthen relationships."

We learned:

- how to safely and respectfully implement British Columbia's Indigenous curriculum requirements
- ways to strengthen our confidence in holding space for challenging conversations about colonization and the injustices and inequities towards Indigenous peoples on the lands we live upon as settlers, and
- practices to strengthen respectful, caring connections between students and staff and within groups of students with diverse backgrounds

The IndigenEYEZ experience deepened our understanding of Indigenous culture and teachings and had a great impact on the continued evolution of our Land-Based Learning Community. This community of learners have embraced what Knowledge Keeper, *skniṛm̓n* (Buttercup), Anona Kampe has taught us, *"It's a reciprocal relationship, where I take but I always give"* during our weekly half-day visits to Chichester Wetlands, and within our own Indigenous Garden. We are particularly proud of our

Mission Creek Week called "Igniting the *P?ax* (spark)" where Elders, Knowledge Keepers, district staff, parent volunteers and 84 Pearson Panthers spent the week gathering in circle (acknowledging the equal presence of everyone in the circle), explored nature through wonder, nature journaled, and learned about Indigenous plants and species from a local Knowledge Keeper. The land will continue to be our teacher.

ḡast səl'x̣sal't (Good Day)



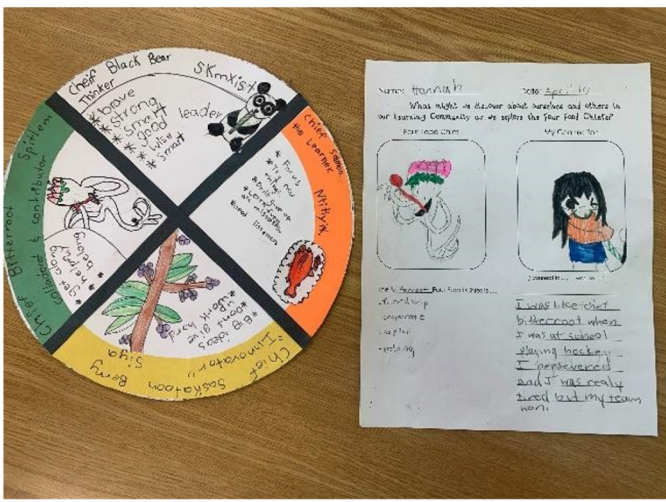
Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans Focus on Equity

Raymer Elementary



As a staff, during Implementation Day and staff meetings, we have worked towards understanding Indigenous perspectives and our connection to the land through our Land Acknowledgements. Through the sharing of our District Vice-Principal, we began our understanding of what a land acknowledgement is and why it is important followed by experiencing provocations that inspired our own personal land acknowledgements. By grounding ourselves on the land during this creation, we were able to honour our connections to the land we live, learn and love.



To honour Orange Shirt Day, Raymer Elementary as a school community, we painted rocks orange and placed them along the creek that runs by Raymer Road. Each student was invited to write a word on their rock to represent how they believe school should feel. Our intention was to have members of the community take a moment and reflect on the words that were represented and shared in honour of those who were and are impacted by Residential Schools.

Teachers at Raymer are embedding the story of the Four Food Chiefs into their daily teaching and how it



translates and connects to the Attributes of a Learner. Throughout the year, as students explore each Food Chief, they create a personal image as they discover the ways they grow and develop their attributes. This photo is an example of how students shared their understanding and connection to Bitterroot, the Contributor and Collaborator.

"I have been at Raymer for six and half years, and during that time I was in a smaller office, where I could fit 1-2 students and myself. I used various spaces when available to host larger activities with students. Last year, we were given an opportunity to reimagine new spaces for learning and working. I immediately signed up as I had had a vision for years to turn our upstairs space (math storage) into a Gathering Room for our Indigenous students. I knew I could create something magical, warm, and cozy. The space upstairs now has an emotional regulation area, crafts and traditional games shelves, a hygiene station, a large closet for extra clothes and shoes for students to access, and two tables for learning: one with chairs and one that feels like we're outside on the grass with comfy pillows."

As soon as I could show off our new area to staff and students, everyone had something positive to say. The students were so excited to have somewhere to gather that was just for them and they love our big new area. I loved that I was able to take a storage space that wasn't functional and create a functional room that promotes connection, laughter, and sparks joy in our young learners."

Submitted by Roxanne Phillips – Indigenous Student Advocate



Prepared by Jody Crumb, Teacher and Kyla Babcock, Principal

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans

Focus on Equity

Webber Road Elementary



In partnership with our local community, Webber Road Elementary promotes equity and takes action towards truth and reconciliation. Our school is committed to deepening our understanding of the Okanagan syilx territory and our shared responsibility towards the land through meaningful activities and building relationships. As part of our emphasis on outdoor learning, our students' ongoing Webber Road Creek project has transformed the area into a beautiful space. The students gather by the creek in a circle, learning about local Indigenous plants and their traditional uses.



Learning on the Land brings connection and collaboration



Walking to remember
"Every Child Matters"

Guided by Knowledge Keeper Anona Kampe from the Penticton Indian Band and the Indigenous Cultural Department, students actively deepen their connection to the land.



Indigenous Stick Games

Additionally, our leadership students have been actively creating and sharing their personal land acknowledgements demonstrating their commitment to respecting the land and fostering continued learning. We are also dedicated to building ties with the Indigenous Learning Community at MBSS, inviting them to our school to teach Traditional Indigenous games to our entire school.

Orange Shirt Day is a poignant and vital commemoration that highlights the intergenerational impacts of the residential school system on Indigenous communities in Canada. This day is a powerful symbol of resilience, remembrance, and reconciliation at Webber Road. It is a day to honour survivors, recognize past atrocities, and commit to building a more inclusive and equitable future. Through wearing orange shirts and engaging in discussions and activities, individuals unite in solidarity, raising awareness about the need for healing and understanding. Orange Shirt Day is a solemn reminder of the ongoing journey towards truth, justice, and healing for Indigenous peoples across the globe.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans Focus on Equity

École Dr Knox Middle School



École Dr Knox Middle School is working toward truth and reconciliation as well as taking action towards anti-racism through Social Emotional Learning. Dr Knox Middle's Implementation Day used the First Peoples Principles of Learning to make the connection to the land we inhabit and the transformative influence of words within our school community. Additionally, we explored the critical vocabulary of anti-racism. The goal for the school has been to cultivate a deeper understanding of Indigenization and its seamless integration into our curriculum which students are exposed to every day.

At the beginning of this year, as part of École Dr Knox Middle School's Social Emotional Learning lessons, the entire school participated in a school wide lesson on "Where I'm from" and students learned how to introduce themselves using nsilxcən and explain key aspects of their identity, including the influences of important people, places and traditions in their life.



To further enhance our understanding and commitment to Truth and Reconciliation and Equity in Action, the school engaged in various lessons and activities. These included recognizing Orange Shirt Day, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Ribbon Skirt Day, Red Dress Day, and participating in the Moose Hide Campaign.

École Dr Knox Middle School has also been able to be a partner in the Land-Based Learning program and the student leaders have come back with their learning to share with the rest of the school community. Highlighted below is grade 8 student Finnley Scott's reflection on the importance of embedding Land-Based learning within the wider school community:



"As an Indigenous student of the Dr Knox community, I have had the privilege and opportunity of learning in a culturally diverse environment. Each of my teachers have pushed me to become the person I am today. They allow me to dive deeper into my heritage and cultural background through writing assignments and projects. The teachings there have transferred to my Land-Based Learning class.

Land Based Learning has made me more ambitious to talk to other people with similar heritages and has furthered my understanding of other languages including nsilxcən (the local language of the Okanagan), which has been taught at Dr Knox for many years. When I was making obsidian arrows in Land-Based learning, I was able to calm my nerves.

By helping me connect with my own ancestry I have been inspired to continue to embrace my Métis heritage all while using what Dr Knox and Land-Based Learning have taught me and this has made me be more confident and comfortable in my identity as a Métis person."



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Year Four Progress - School Community Learning Plans

Focus on Equity

École Okanagan Mission Secondary



This year, the OKM community embarked on a focused journey toward equity and reconciliation.

At Implementation Day, our staff dedicated the morning to reflection, setting the stage for meaningful action. In the weeks that followed, teachers came together in small groups during staff meetings to share their commitments and explore concrete steps to advance reconciliation within our school.

OKM's student-led Remembrance Day ceremony paid special tribute to Indigenous veterans. With the guidance of our Indigenous Advocate, students sang and drummed the Okanagan song. Our Huskies also performed the Okanagan song at the BCPVPA conference in October, held at Canyon Falls Middle School. This marked the first time OKM students shared the song with the broader community. Additionally, Indigenous students, under their advocate's leadership, guided the entire school through a candle-lighting ceremony, reinforcing our collective commitment to peace and unity.

Many of our teachers have embraced the work of decolonizing the classroom. Kelly Hanson's Advanced Placement Capstone, Seminar, and English First Peoples 12 class was an example of this effort, where students explored personal interests, engaged in sustainability studies, and spent time connecting with the land. Remarkably, one of our Indigenous learners, Erin Work, represented Canada on the world stage at the UN Climate Change Conference. Kevin Fisher, a Curricular Leader, focused his action research project on the significance of gathering in circles to foster a sense of community within the classroom. Farah Canuel, art specialist, dedicated her year to preparing to teach the locally developed Indigenous Visual Art Course. Meanwhile, Lisa Gerber took on the challenge of facilitating open and honest conversations about



Students in Mr. Fisher's classroom beginning the day gathered in circle.

race in the classroom. These efforts, along with the work of many other passionate educators at OKM, reflect our school's deep commitment to equity and reconciliation.

In addition, OKM's Inclusive Education team collaborated with our Indigenous advocate, tutors, and teachers to breathe new life into our school garden. Together, a small but dedicated group of learners and staff committed to growing not only flowers and vegetables but also plants indigenous to the Okanagan, symbolizing our respect for the land we inhabit.

Responding to the hopes of our Indigenous students, OKM has introduced meaningful new traditions. One such initiative, led by Indigenous Success Teacher Amber Otke, invited Indigenous graduates to create ribbon shirts or skirts as a way to honor their achievements. OKM extended this opportunity to their mothers, aunts, and close family friends, creating a warm, intergenerational experience as they sewed together. This year, we proudly celebrated our largest cohort of Indigenous graduates - a milestone that filled us with immense pride.

As we continue to learn and grow as a community, OKM remains steadfast in its commitment to fostering equity, truth, and reconciliation.

Pictured to the left: Students regularly participated in reflection and journaling activities throughout the year in a variety of locations in the Okanagan. This intentional opportunity to learn on the land is an example of decolonizing the classroom learning experience.



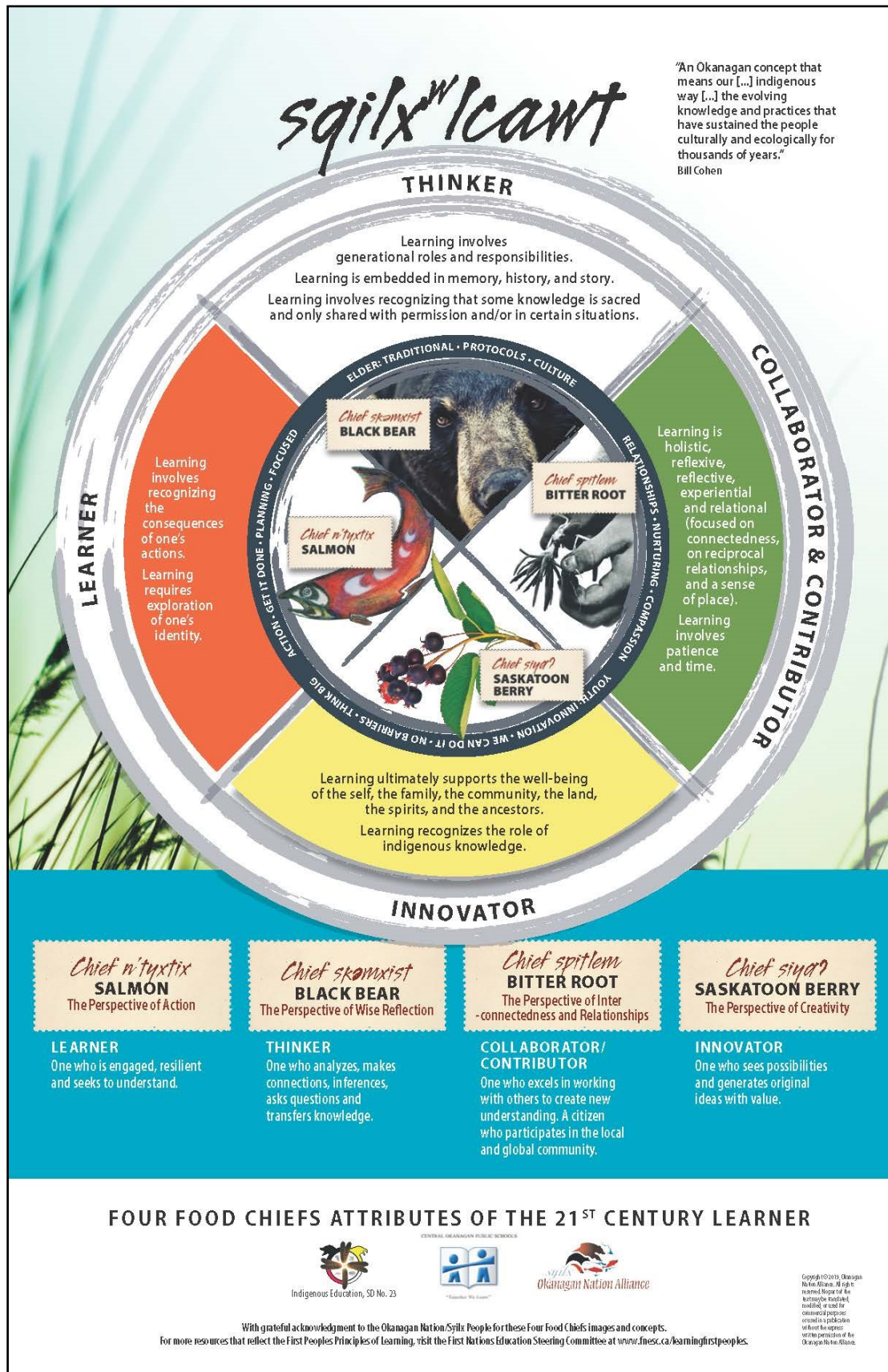
Beginning stages of the garden revitalization process.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Our Indigenous Education

Department Responsibilities

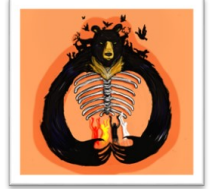


Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

Chief skəmxiŋ Black Bear
*Elders: Traditional*Protocols*Culture*



Our Commitment:

We are committed to fostering intellectual and cultural growth through an Indigenous mindset.

What We Are Doing:

Elders in Residence

Central Okanagan Public Schools believe in holding up the voices of Indigenous Elders through the Indigenous Education Department's Elder in Residence Program. Elders bring their traditional knowledges, stories, and wisdom to classrooms across Central Okanagan Public Schools. Students and staff are given teachings on Elder protocol to ensure our knowledge keepers are lifted up and honoured in good ways. Elders share teachings on the importance of land and language, traditional medicines, *capitakw*, traditional knowledges, and the history of Residential Schools with our children and staff. We teach our children to listen with their whole hearts and minds when we are gifted with knowledge from Elders. Elders are often invited to teacher learning events to provide traditional welcomes, share teachings, and offer blessings to the land. We hope to continue to develop an understanding of the importance of respecting and caring for the land, for all who live, work, and play on the syilx territory.

Read the words of our Elders when we asked why they feel the Elders in Residence Program is so important:



Elder Maureen Ziprick

"Our children have grown up in this concrete world with lost identities. Our elders draw a map to find land. They will find everything they need to survive. Water, food, medicines. This is where they will learn the laws and protocols of their ancestors. It is now their responsibility to draw this map.....of survival."



Elder Randy Swanson

"Today's students face many dynamics in a rapidly changing world, and this can be particularly challenging for Indigenous students given their unique histories. When a student is hesitant to approach teachers or parents with issues or concerns, knowing that an Elder is available for support can be a great source of comfort. Elders help the students connect with their culture, traditions and history. You have to know where you come from before you know where you are going."



Elder Rose Lube

"This program helps provide support and encouragement to the students while offering a living connection to the history, traditions and culture of our people. This knowledge shared and valued as we grow together in community."

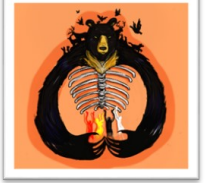
Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department Our Progress



Thinking Twelve not Ten

The Central Okanagan Public Schools' Indigenous Education Department has been working towards a "twelve not ten" model of support. In the summer of 2024, this goal was realized more fully than ever before and we are optimistic that we will continue to grow the twelve-month model of supporting students and families. In addition to two Vice-Principals and a Director of Instruction, the department employs two Indigenous Student Wellness Workers and a Lead Indigenous Student Advocate. Together, our twelve-month staff support students and families when school is not in session.



Our team organizes and facilitates youth drop-in sessions at various locations in Kelowna and West Kelowna, providing much needed connection, as well as food and hygiene supplies when needed. Additionally, our Wellness Workers continue to support priority learners with whom they have been connected throughout the school year. Similarly, our Lead Indigenous Student Advocate works with school-based Advocates to reach out to families as a point of connection and a support when needed.

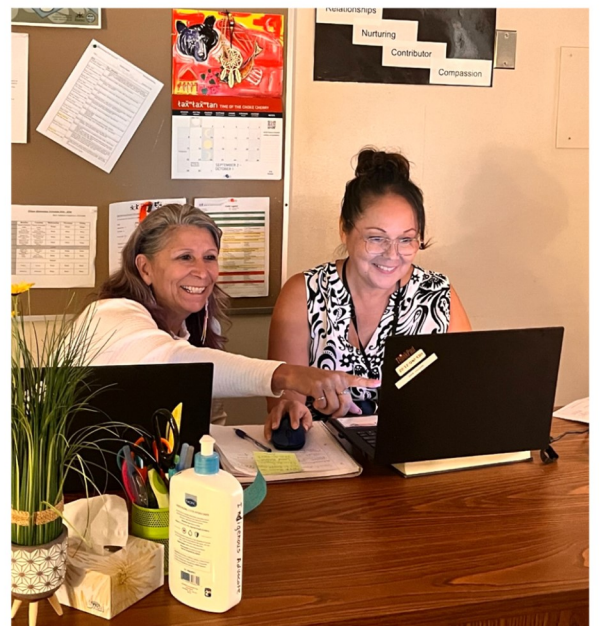
We are pleased with the move towards a "twelve not ten model" of support. Given that the majority of our department staff are ten-month employees and do not work in the summer, we have started to make a positive shift towards a twelve-month support structure. We are optimistic that we can make it even better next summer.

Lead Indigenous Student Advocate

The Lead Indigenous Student Advocate (Lead Advocate) position was created in the Spring of 2023 and has been a positive addition to the Indigenous Education Department. The Lead Advocate provides leadership in the development and implementation of the District's Indigenous Education Department advocacy program, supports the onboarding and orientation of new Indigenous Student Advocates, including school-based mentorship, and provides guidance to deepen understanding of Indigenous cultural practices.

Additionally, the Lead Advocate supports Advocates in their school-based record-keeping.

A noticeably positive outcome of the addition of the Lead Advocate position has been the ability for ten-month staff, through the Lead Advocate, to support students and families twelve months of the year. Working through the summer break, the Lead Advocate connects with families to ensure needs such as food insecurity are met. The addition of the Lead Advocate position has been an integral part of moving from a ten-month to a twelve-month model of support; "thinking twelve not ten."



Lead Student Advocate, Simone Gauthier supporting Student Advocate, Barb Haldane

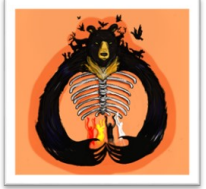
Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

What We Are Also Doing:

The Indigenous Education Department provides academic, social and emotional, cultural and wellness support to Indigenous learners (K-12) in a variety of ways:



Indigenous Student Advocates provide support in and out of classrooms, attend academic support meetings, fostering home and school connections, and provide one to one academic, social and emotional assistance in Indigenous Gathering spaces at all school sites. Student Advocates work to create belonging, safe spaces, and welcoming school environments.

Middle and Secondary School Indigenous Education Success Teachers provide academic support to middle/secondary Indigenous students from grades 6-12.

Indigenous Education Early Learning Teacher Consultants provide early literacy support to priority Indigenous learners (K-6) with a strong emphasis on early literacy intervention for Indigenous learners K-3.

Academy of Indigenous Studies at secondary schools provide opportunities for Indigenous students to receive credit in courses such as English First Peoples, BC First Peoples, Indigenous Visual Art and Indigenous Leadership with Indigenous curricular content taught through Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Indigenous Youth Wellness Workers extend services and cultural support to Indigenous students for the purposes of providing counselling through Indigenous wellness perspectives and practices. The goal is to deepen students' sense of balanced wellness, connectedness to learning, and support the unique needs of each learner.

nsyilxcən Language Learning

Many schools offer various language programs and cultural studies, but unfortunately, the Okanagan (syilx) language and traditions are often not included. Few people in the community speak nsyilxcən, but opportunities to learn the language are gradually increasing. At Peachland Elementary School, we are extremely fortunate and grateful to have Jasmine Peone, a Westbank First Nation Band member, who dedicates her time to teach the entire school the nsyilxcən language and syilx traditions. These thirty-minute classes often begin with simple vocabulary, greetings, and basic phrases, laying a solid foundation for further learning. This journey not only teaches students to communicate in a rare language but also broadens their horizons by introducing them to the local culture and ways of thinking.



Jasmine Peone teaching learners about the nsyilxcən language

Submitted by Kaelan George, Indigenous Student Advocate



Canyon Falls Middle was alive with the nsyilxcən language as learners practiced alphabet and pronunciation in the common area while future singers learned drum protocol and began learning the Okanagan Song from Penticton Indian Band Knowledge Keeper Anone Kampe in the Gathering Place. We are grateful for Knowledge Keepers sharing culture, especially during Truth and Reconciliation week.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

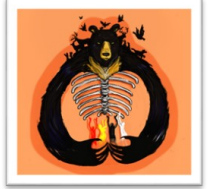
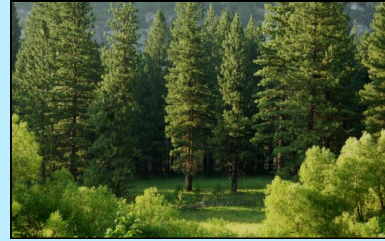
My Land Acknowledgement

By Katie Reid, grade 5

Hello my name is Katie Beth Reid, and my ancestors are from England and Scotland. I would like to honour the existence of the Indigenous peoples by acknowledging that we are on the traditional land of the syilx in this place that is known today as Okanagan Valley.

I appreciate this place because of the space in nature that it provides us, where we can relax, laugh, play and let go of our worries. I appreciate the snow capped mountains and the trees that give us fresh oxygen to breathe, and that this is a special place that not many have where we can learn on. I am grateful to the land for giving resources for us to use and for refreshing us with cold water.

I commit to walking to school everyday because the trees need fresh air to grown in that is not polluted by gas from cars. Also, they need to be treated respectfully so they can grow tall and turn carbon dioxide into oxygen that keeps us alive. The relationship I want to have with the land is strong and connected. I want the land to look at me as a friend not a foe.



Truth Shows Itself Workshop

The Truth Series, sponsored by the Kelowna Heritage Museum and facilitated by Elders Grouse and Pamela Barnes, the *k'west'lap ee Stethtatht* (Truth Shows Itself) workshop series supports participants on their journey to Truth and Reconciliation. Learners engage with syilx Elders on a range of topics, including syilx Indigenous worldviews, history of contact, current affairs, and a positive way forward. Several Indigenous and non-Indigenous district staff, including Indigenous Education Department staff, teachers, Certified Education Assistants, Principals and Vice-Principals participated in this twelve-hour learning opportunity. The opportunity to be in community and learning from local Elders is invaluable and connects to Central Okanagan Public Schools commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, which starts from a place of learning.



nsyilxcən at Chief Tomat Elementary School



As part of our ongoing work towards Equity in Action and reconciliation, it is important that we have a strong presence of nsyilxcən, the local language of the Okanagan syilx people.

Mrs. Robbins and her grade 3 class have been learning and sharing with us different words throughout the year. We can all appreciate this learning and language together when we push the buttons to hear her speak the words in both English and nsyilxcən.

What a gift to our school!
limləmt, thank you, Mrs. Robbins and grade 3's!

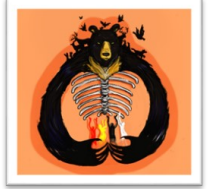
Submitted by Jennifer Adamson, Principal

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department Our Progress

Cultural Program

The Indigenous Cultural Program in Central Okanagan Public School in Kelowna, British Columbia, plays a crucial role in promoting, preserving, and honouring Indigenous culture within the education system and the K-12 classroom. Central to this initiative is the Cultural Coordinator, who is responsible for organizing cultural events, distributing Indigenous-based resources, and coordinating cultural materials for Indigenous Student Advocates and Gathering Rooms.



This role also involves scheduling Cultural Presenters to visit classrooms, where they engage students with activities connected to local and national Indigenous teachings on subjects such as ethnobotany, governance, traditional housing, traditional fishing, the fur trade, the medicine wheel, the blanket exercise, personal pouches, and uses of leather. These presenters carefully prepare materials that enrich the students' understanding of these topics, providing a hands-on and immersive learning experience.

This year, the total number of classrooms visited for cultural presentations was 331, with a total of 6,883 students engaging local cultural teachings. This included 1,722 being the number of cultural presentations delivered to students.



Sharon Hopf, Cultural Presenter with Casorso Kindergarten learners making Arrowleaf Balsamroot flowers



Another integral component of the program is the Elders in Residence program, which supports K-12 learning by fostering sacred connections with the community.

Additionally, the Primary Winter Gathering is a significant event for Grade 3 students across Central Okanagan Public Schools. Held over four days in the winter, this Gathering celebrates Indigenous identity through dance, song, and storytelling.

For Grade 12 students, the Indigenous Education Department offers two graduate retreat field studies, where students delve into their cultural identity and learn from Elders and local Knowledge Keepers. These retreats culminate in the Blanketing Ceremony, a celebration of their achievements, attended by family members, distinguished guests, and Elders.

Throughout the year, all connections made within schools and the community are meticulously tracked to ensure that targeted funding is effectively reaching Indigenous students and that cultural services are being adequately provided.

Teachings!

"All the different levels of interpretation of the medicine wheel and how each quadrant can represent so many different teachings."

Rutland Elementary School

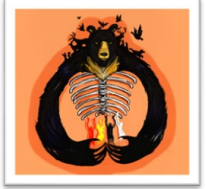
"Leaving the land better than you found it is a message grade ones understand."
North Glenmore Elementary

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department Our Progress

Primary Winter Gathering

From January 23rd to January 26th, the Indigenous Education Department was honoured to host the Primary Winter Gathering, a cultural event for 220 grade 3 Indigenous students. The traditional sounds of songs and dance resonated throughout the halls of the Kelowna and District Fish and Game Club, located on the Traditional Territory of the syilx Okanagan People.



"It was fun to hear the story of Coyote and Eagle."

learning: is holistic, embedded in story, involves generational roles, and is reciprocal.

Engaging in local protocols, singing the Okanagan Song, and listening to storytelling of "How Food was Given" by Coralee Miller and the story of "Coyote and Eagle" by Anona Kampe, students learn about the importance of community and resiliency.



"I wonder if I can go to a powwow."

hope that students left this event with a profound sense of self and pride, a greater appreciation for the syilx land, and a strengthened connection to their Indigenous community.

Thank you to Caleb from Artona for capturing these beautiful images.

During this Gathering, students actively participated in cultural learning, aiming to explore the depths of their Indigenous identity. The primary objectives included fostering a sense of pride by celebrating culture through cultural engagement such as song, beading, dance, *capitkwl*, drumming, and storytelling. The Primary Winter Gathering aims to cultivate stronger connections with Elders, teachers, community, and self.

We model the First Peoples Principles of Learning that



"I loved drumming with my friends and learning about beading."

The Gathering is planned with deep intentions, inviting students to meet in circle, learn about land acknowledgments, and learn about reciprocity and Elder care.

We were honoured to have the traditional gifts and knowledge of Birch Creek offering their gifted drumming, and community members, Elders Maureen Ziprick and Bonnie Coble. Grade 12 Indigenous Leadership students were also actively involved in providing student support and mentorship throughout the Gathering. *sənsisyustən* House of Learning students gifted us with their traditional talents and sang the Okanagan Song. We



"I am excited to show my family my photo with regalia."

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

Chief sp̓ɬtlem Bitter Root
*Relationships*Nurturing*Compassion*



Our Commitment:

We are committed to fostering reciprocal relationships for the health and well-being of each Indigenous learner, inspiring confidence and a sense of connectedness to others.

What We Are Doing:

The Indigenous Education Department's 75-member staff (Indigenous Student Advocates, Success Teachers, Indigenous Youth Wellness Workers, Indigenous Resource/Support Consultants, Land-Based Learning Team, Cultural Coordinator and Presenters, Administration, and Clerical Team) and Elders in Residence strive to support all Indigenous students in a compassionate and nurturing manner throughout the school year. Strong connections and relationships foster emotional well-being. Support in and out of the school is provided through Indigenous wellness perspectives and practices twelve months of the year.

Métis Grant

In the 2023-2024 school year, the Indigenous Education Department continued to benefit from a generous grant provided by the Kelowna Métis Association (KMA). This funding was used to create a learning opportunity for our Elementary Advocate Team with the goal of enhancing cultural awareness and a sense of identity for Métis learners in Central Okanagan public schools. Christie Russell, District Vice-Principal, and Kim Kosik, Early Years Table, *sax'kn̓xitəlx kl c̓əcm̓la?*, Coordinator, Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA), worked together to integrate literacy practices with cultural teachings. They achieved this by using story workshop methods and a newly published children's book, "*Métis Like Me*," in a take-and-make professional development session.



Student Advocate, Tamara Rose, with students at Davidson Road Elementary School



L-R Jesse Bruce - Director of Indigenous Education and Equity; Brad Dahl - Kelowna Métis Association, Kim Kosik, - Okanagan Nation Alliance Early Years Table Coordinator; Christie Russell - District Vice-Principal, Indigenous Education

During the session, Advocates learned about Métis culture and explored ways to promote oral language by creating and using loose parts to retell and expand stories. Each Advocate left with the book "*Métis Like Me*," natural and felt loose parts, and a newfound understanding of hands-on literacy practices. Advocates gained strategies to enhance oral language skills, cultural awareness, and self-identity in schools.



Advocates returned to their schools with deep, culturally responsive learning about Métis culture and shared photo documentation of students actively engaging in these new practices. We were particularly proud of the collaboration between the Métis community and Westbank First Nation, which supported the learning and pride of all Indigenous students.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

Indigenous Youth Wellness Workers



In addition to Indigenous Student Advocates, Central Okanagan Public Schools' Indigenous students and families are supported by two Wellness Workers. Together, Indigenous Wellness Workers provide services, cultural support, and counselling services through Indigenous wellness perspectives and practices. In this way, Indigenous students are connected to a deeper sense of balanced wellness, providing greater connectedness to their learning, overall happiness, and self-esteem. From September to June, our team of Wellness Workers work one on one with students at the recommendation of school-based staff. In the summer months, they host wellness drop-ins around the City of Kelowna and in West Kelowna. Drop Ins are an opportunity to carry out twelve-month services to youth, support food insecurity, provide hygiene supplies, and stay connected over the summer months. Additionally, Wellness Workers continue to support individual students as needed in the summer.



Connecting to Culture at North Glenmore Elementary

When I asked my Indigenous students to describe what Culture Club meant to them in one word, they individually said, **“connection, love, safety, culture, learning, finding self, confidence, happiness, and peace.”** To me these words are very powerful coming from children ages 5-11 and honestly give me goose bumps all over. Some students have also been teaching their parents culture that they have learned from culture club which brings their families together outside of school. I think the goal of Indigenous Culture Club is to teach Indigenous students the culture they have lost from Residential schools so they can teach other people which creates community, self-confidence, resilience, leadership, self-worth, knowledge, connection, increased attendance, better grades, and the feeling of safety within a structured, colonized school system. The children feel like they belong, and it is the best part of being an Indigenous Advocate seeing them find themselves. They crave to be in the presence of Indigenous Advocates, Elders, and Cultural Presenters so they can learn who they are. Culture Club is everything to Indigenous students. It is a time when they can shine and be heard and find their "why" and "wonder" about themselves.



Submitted by Naomi Ehlers, Indigenous Student Advocate

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department Our Progress

Yukon First Nation Education Directorate Visit



During Spring Break of 2024, Christie Russell (District Vice-Principal, Indigenous Education Department), Nathen Elliott (Principal, Central Programs and Services), Simone Gauthier (Lead Advocate), and Tyna Smith (Student Advocate) journeyed to the 5th Annual First Nation Education Directorate Conference in Whitehorse, Yukon. We were graciously received by Melanie Bennett, YFNED Executive Director, and her team, and were deeply honoured to be welcomed into the community and to share a meal in circle on our first night in the Yukon. While in the Yukon, our team presented on the theme of mentorship within Indigenous communities and schools, striving to foster a holistic educational environment.



Our experience also encompassed land-based learning at the Ama Ku site, where we absorbed traditional ways of existence, knowledge, and leadership during conference sessions. We were inspired by the insights on mentorship shared by keynote speakers Bob Joseph and Albert Marshall. The gala event treated us to traditional performances including hoop dancing, drumming, singing, and a comedy show.



Central Okanagan Public Schools Representatives
Nathen Elliott, Simone Gauthier, Christie Russell
and Tyna Smith



L-R: Tyna Smith, Simone Gauthier,
YFNED Elder Annie Bernard, Christie Russell

Chief Amanda Leas reminded us of the significance of prioritizing our own wellness, stating, ***“Education is not just for kids. It is about all the people who uplift kids.”*** Our visit to Ama Ku and the heartfelt words of Albert Marshall underscored the vital connection between language, land, and Indigenous peoples. Marshall urged educators to incorporate land-based learning, stating, ***“We can’t revitalize our language without land-based knowledge.”***

Our exploration of mentorship yielded invaluable insights that we could bring back to our school communities. The importance of mentorship for all Indigenous people was exemplified by Melanie Bennett’s insightful words: ***“Always have one mentor older than you, one the same age, and one younger than you. It’s the younger ones that I always hold in high regard because they often possess a voice that is overlooked.”*** Central Okanagan Public Schools look forward to continuing to build and deepen relationships with the Yukon

First Nations Education Directorate community in the future.

limlōmt to our Yukon First Nations Education Directorate family for their generosity and providing a rich time of learning for our Central Okanagan Public Schools.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

Chief siya? Saskatoon Berry

*Youth*Innovation*We Can Do It*No Barriers*Think Big*



Our Commitment:

We are committed to co-creating cultural opportunities that strengthen home, school, and community connections.

What We Are Doing:

Indigenous students at all grade levels are encouraged to participate in a variety of cultural opportunities throughout the school year. In and out of the school, students participate in classroom presentations, lunch and after school programs. Through the 2023-2024 school year, students were able to participate in community events such as *siya?* hosted by Westbank First Nation, and Turtle Island Festival, hosted by the Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society. The Indigenous Education Department strives to strengthen home, school and community connections through cultural teachings.

Indigenous Science in Action

In the 2023-2024 school year, Indigenous students at MBSS had the unique opportunity to explore Indigenous pedagogies by learning, alongside their Advocates, the traditional art of scraping, salting, and tanning hides.

Utilizing rabbit, deer, and moose hides, students learned hands-on how to use various tools to scrape a hide and gained knowledge of traditional scraping materials, such as bones and stones. Students also embarked on the challenging task of pulling tufts of hairs out from the hides, harvesting the hair for hide tufting art, exploring in real time the care and respect traditionally taken to make use of all parts of the animal. In addition to using store-bought chemicals, students experimented with the chemical reaction of tannins using traditional brain solution; they learned the science of using salt to pull moisture from hides and why the salt works to help dry out hides; students learned about hide stretchers and how to stretch hides; students further considered the traditional uses of both raw and tanned hides such as clothing, housing, drums, rattles, and snowshoes.

Students were engaged throughout the process, working communally and noting the hard physical work it takes to tan a hide using traditional methods. There was plenty of laughter, noting how much fun, and tough work, it was to learn Science through traditional cultural activities.

This Fall 2024, the Indigenous Advocates at MBSS have secured an outdoor classroom space located next to the Gathering Room where hide tanning, smudging, and other Indigenous pedagogies and technologies can be explored on an ongoing basis. The new Indigenous outdoor classroom is located in the courtyard at the centre of the school, putting the ingenuity of Indigenous Science on display for the entire school community to explore.



Advocates leading students in the learning of the traditional art of scraping, salting, and tanning hides.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

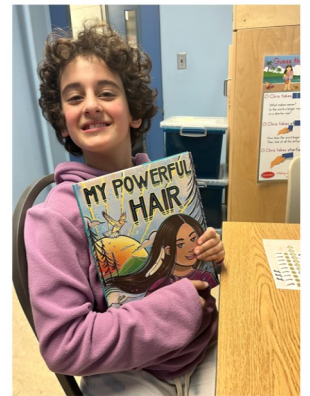
Indigenous Early Learning Program



Family Literacy Night
at Chief Tomat Elementary

In the 2023/2024 school year, Reanna Lamb and Nadine Onespot collectively supported seven elementary schools and upwards of 128 Indigenous early learners in Kindergarten to Grade 3 to enhance literacy acquisition. Embracing a culturally responsive approach, Reanna and Nadine were guided by the First Peoples Principles of Learning, to cultivate a passion for literacy by means of oral storytelling, phonics instruction, written responses, and exploring story through materials. With a holistic view of learning, student well-being including physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness, was addressed through carefully crafted learning experiences.

Reanna and Nadine's collaborative endeavors extended beyond the classroom, actively involving the community, including hosting family literacy nights at the schools, being part of the *sax'k'ixitax kl c'acmála?* Early Years Table, engaging with Elders and continuing to build relationships with Kelowna Métis Society and Westbank First Nation. Through community connections, comprehensive support is provided to learners, addressing both their academic and holistic well-being.



Indigenous Literacy



Family Literacy Night
at Springvalley Elementary

In their commitment to inclusivity, Reanna and Nadine advocate for all learners within the district, supporting teachers in their pursuit of localizing, indigenizing, and decolonizing classroom environments. Their initiatives extend to hosting informative lunch and learns, contributing to staff meetings with educational sessions, and delivering professional development workshops to Indigenous Advocates within the Indigenous Education Department.



Literacy Learning at
Springvalley Elementary.



Learners using culturally responsive learning resources to express themselves, empowering them to use their voices to share their truth.



Kade at Webber Road Elementary
exploring ways to traditionally
prepare salmon over the fire
and using a smokehouse.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

RE-Storying Community Performing Arts

Inspiring! Creative! A one of a kind evening that is sure to ignite similar events throughout Central Okanagan Public Schools. Peachland Elementary School's 'Cirque de la forêt' gathered community to celebrate local syilx teachings, visual and performing arts, and the pinnacle of collaboration. In a spirit of togetherness, and in a decolonized and student-centered approach, each student in the school, from kindergarten to grade five, was engaged in the magic of performing. From bubble making to creating props, from designing costumes to building sets, from singing and dancing to narrating and playing instruments, each student and staff, as well as many community members contributed to a magnificent evening of performances. Outside, with a forested backdrop, families enjoyed the beauty of the land while proudly cheering their young performers on. Four performances, including the Four Food Chiefs Story, each constructed with learners at the centre, placed an emphasis on memory, history, and story, were wholistic in nature, and recognized the role of Indigenous knowledge. With thanks to the Artist in Residence program, which bring local artists into schools, local Knowledge Keeper and nsyilxcən language teacher, Jasmine Peone, and the Peachland Elementary School staff and Peachland community. We invite you to access the video story of this event using this QR Code or see the link [here](#).



"How Food Was Given"



Spotted Lake

Once a year, the Indigenous Advocates accompany teachers and approximately 40 students in the learning community class for a field trip to Spotted Lake in Osoyoos, BC. We are incredibly fortunate to have the support of Okanagan Indian Band Elders and members, who graciously give us their time and their knowledge and meet us at Spotted Lake for a day of culture and wisdom. We spend the day drumming, singing, sharing a meal together, and exploring the sacred land. Students learn about the history of Spotted Lake, along with local traditions and stories. Our students are able to share some of their drumming and singing with the local community members who escorted us through the territory. It is a wonderful day filled with shared knowledge and kindness. Our students are given permission to harvest sage to take home and we reflected about the experiences of the day on the drive home. It is an honor and a privilege to be invited to Spotted Lake. We look forward to this trip every year.

Submitted by Candice McKendry
Indigenous Student Advocate, Rutland Senior Secondary School



My Land Acknowledgement

By Mason Kobryn, grade 5

Hello, my name is Mason James Kobryn, and my ancestors are from northern Europe and Canada. I would like to honour the existence of the Indigenous Peoples by acknowledging that we are on the traditional land of the syilx in this place that today is known as the Okanagan Valley. I appreciate this place because of the fact that even though many people are from many different places and countries, everyone shows respect to each other. In addition, the mountains and forests are good for mountain biking and hiking. Also, the beautiful Okanagan Lake, which is fun to go boating on and it's refreshing in the summer to go for a swim in. Something else that's awesome is when it's the right time of year in some places you can pick your own produce like cherries. I am grateful to the land for giving me a place to relax on, a place to peacefully live on and always something beautiful to look at.

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department Our Progress

2024 Indigenous Student Leadership Summit



The Indigenous Education Department proudly took part in the second annual Indigenous Student Leadership Summit held May 6-7 at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC. This year, the Okanagan Mainline Regional Indigenous Educators (OMRIE) and the Ministry of Education and Child Care partnered to create the Summit with a focus on Anti-Racism. The intention of this event was for Indigenous student leaders to share in collaboration and collective voice with senior decision makers in their respective districts, region, and province on Anti-Racism.

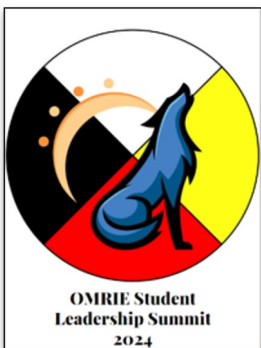
OMRIE is a group of Indigenous district leaders who come together regularly to share resources and practices across districts, from the Lower Mainland to the Okanagan, to the Kootenay regions. April Strickland, District Vice-Principal - Indigenous Education, who has been involved with OMRIE for the past few years, collaboratively planned this opportunity with other district leaders to ensure Indigenous student voice is represented and heard.

While at the Summit, students participated in workshops to share their views on Anti-Racism. Nine Indigenous students and five district staff members, including Indigenous Advocates, teachers, and administrators, from Central Okanagan Public Schools participated in this interactive and engaging summit.

The students arrived the first day to a delicious meal and then participated in a scavenger hunt designed by Thompson Rivers University. On the second day, students began their day networking and sharing thoughts and ideas around Anti-Racism. There was a Grand March and wise words given by Knowledge Keeper, Jackie Jules. When addressing the students about racism, Ms. Jules stated, *"Let's meet in a good and great way, always."*

The keynote speaker Laura Grizzlypaws, Educational Developer of Indigenous Teaching and Learning, also shared her lived experience around racism. Ms. Grizzlypaws shared, *"It doesn't matter about the colour of your skin. Creator doesn't judge by that. We are all people of the land."*

In the afternoon, students participated in student-led breakout sessions to share their experiences and views on anti-racism, and adults were in the room as witnesses. Once the sessions were over, students came together and shared with the Ministry of Education and Child Care action plans to dismantle systemic racism and discrimination.



The Indigenous Education Department sends a huge thank you to the following staff who helped chaperone and witness this impactful event:

Christey Hughes, Vice-Principal, École Kelowna Secondary School
Laurel McCarthy, Teacher, École George Elliot Secondary School
Candice McKendry, Indigenous Student Advocate, Rutland Secondary School
Esmae Rothfusz, Indigenous Student Advocate, École Kelowna Secondary School

As part of this year's theme "humility", the SD73 Indigenous youth chose the coyote and expressed in their words, *"Humility is understanding that everyone has a different journey and respecting not only the place you're at, but also where others are on their journey. Everyone is a sacred part of creation."*

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

Chief n'tyxtix Salmon
*Action*Get It Done*Planning*Focused*



Our Commitment:

We are committed to empowering each Indigenous learner to take action to explore and strengthen their personal identity.

What We Are Doing:

The Indigenous Education Department helps empower each Indigenous learner by providing meaningful cultural opportunities through recognizing milestones and events in their lives.

TAKE A HIKE

WHAT IS TAKE A HIKE?

Take a Hike is a full-time alternate education program that offers students the opportunity to improve their mental health and well-being, build healthy relationships, and fulfill academic and graduation requirements alongside a small cohort of peers. Delivered in partnership between the school district and the Take a Hike Youth Mental Health Foundation, the program embeds one full-time mental health clinician, weekly outdoor activities, and community involvement within an alternate education context.



TAKE A HIKE in Central Okanagan Public Schools

The Take a Hike program services middle years learners, and is operated in collaboration with Central Programs & Services. Students are supported with a low student to staff ratio (maximum 15 learners) that fosters a sense of connection and ensures that individualized programming is in place to meet diverse needs.

OUR LEARNERS

Students may be referred to the Take a Hike program if their needs are not being met in their community school, and may be better supported in an alternate education setting. An ideal candidate for Take a Hike is someone who: requires additional academic and social-emotional support; is seeking a sense of belonging and connection amongst a small cohort of peers; and is open to receiving counselling support.

PROGRAM VALUES

Foundational values include: fostering safe, caring relationships; prioritizing well-being; and supporting youth in their ongoing journey towards personal development and growth.

MEDICINE WHEEL AWARDS

Each year, members of the Indigenous Education Council come together to select Medicine Wheel Award Winners. Each of the six Central Okanagan Public Schools secondary schools host unique Indigenous Graduate's Blanketing Ceremonies, at which we celebrate the successes of all our students. Many students are selected to receive Medicine Wheel Awards. These awards are born from the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel (Intellectual, Spiritual, Physical, and Emotional). Additionally, an All-Around Four Food Chiefs award is given to a recipient who demonstrates fulfilment of the teachings of Chief *spiłəm* (Bitter Root), Chief *siya?* (Saskatoon Berry), Chief *ntytyix* (Salmon), and Chief *skmxist* (Black Bear). Intellectual award winners demonstrate leadership in their schools and community. Physical award winners excel in team sports and/or individual physical accomplishments. Spiritual award winners contribute to their schools and communities through culture and service. Emotional award winners have overcome personal and/or systemic barriers to reach their goal of graduating. The All-Around Four Food Chiefs Award has demonstrated intellectual and cultural growth through an Indigenous mindset, foster relationships for health and well-being, contribute to community, take action to explore their personal identity through, and create cultural opportunities and experience at home, school, and in community. With pride, we celebrate all Indigenous graduates and acknowledge our Medicine Wheel Award Winners.



Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

Land-Based Learning

The “Land-Based Love” program provides an opportunity for up to 120 students per year to be on *tmxʷulaxʷ* (the land) with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Teachers who will embed cultural teachings into the learning. Indigenous students will experience local Okanagan (syilx) Indigenous culture known as *naʔkʷulamən* (the things that we do) and expose them to ways of knowing that have been in the area since time immemorial. This is a unique and innovative opportunity for students to gain a greater sense of how their interaction with local Indigenous culture can provide confidence and growth in the core and curricular competencies, and also spark an interest in one's own connection to traditional lands and their own Indigenous identities.



As part of the Land-Based Love Program, students will participate in gathering medicines, tool making, wild game/salmon food preparation, sewing, making regalia, storytelling, harvesting, carving, plant identification, and many more seasonal activities

Program Objectives:

The primary goal of the Land-Based Love program is to instill a deep sense of pride and understanding of Indigenous culture in middle school students. This is achieved through a curriculum that emphasizes learning from the land and traditional practices that have been passed down through generations. The program is designed to:

- Reconnect Students with the Land: Encourage students to develop a strong connection with the land, recognizing it as a vital part of their cultural identity.
- Preserve Traditional Knowledge: Teach traditional skills and knowledge, such as carving, beading, flint knapping, and the use of local plants, ensuring that these practices are passed onto future generations.
- Foster Cultural Pride: Help students build a strong sense of pride in their Indigenous heritage by immersing them in cultural activities and teachings.
- Promote Community Engagement: Strengthen community ties by involving Elders and Knowledge Keepers in the teaching process, ensuring that cultural transmission is community-led.



Students building a Tule Matt shelter

Program Activities:

The “Land-Based Love” program offers a wide range of activities that are deeply rooted in Indigenous traditions and knowledge. These activities are carefully designed to be both educational and engaging, providing students with practical skills and a deeper understanding of their culture. Key activities include:

- Learning from the Land: Students are taken on guided excursions into nature, where they learn about the environment and the significance of the land in Indigenous culture. These excursions often involve identifying and harvesting traditional plants, understanding their medicinal uses, and learning sustainable practices.
- Carving: Students are taught the art of carving, a traditional skill that is important in many Indigenous cultures. They learn to create everything from spoons to dugout canoes, gaining insight into the cultural symbolism and significance of these items.
- Beaded: Beading is another key activity in the program, where students learn to create intricate designs using beads. This activity not only teaches patience and precision but also connects students to the historical and cultural importance of beading in their communities.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

- Flint Knapping: This ancient skill involves shaping stone into tools and weapons, a practice that has been a part of Indigenous cultures for thousands of years. Through flint knapping, students gain a hands-on understanding of their ancestors' ingenuity and resourcefulness.
- Traditional Plant Knowledge: The program places a strong emphasis on the use of traditional plants for food, medicine, and other purposes. Students learn to identify, harvest, and prepare plants, gaining knowledge that is vital for the preservation of their cultural heritage.
- Traditional Pithouse: *qʷači?* An integral aspect of the “Land-Based Love” program is its partnership with Summerhill Pyramid Winery. This collaboration provides students with access to a traditional pithouse located on the winery's grounds. The *qʷači?*, a significant Indigenous structure, serves as a living classroom where students can immerse themselves in teachings and brilliance of their ancestors. The use of the space is what grounds Land-Based Love students to the traditional use of the land for the rest of the year.



Impact and Outcomes:

The “Land-Based Love” program has a profound impact on the students who participate. By the end of the program, students report a stronger connection to their culture and a deeper appreciation for their heritage. Many students also develop new skills and knowledge that they can share with their families and communities, contributing to the preservation of Indigenous traditions.

Additionally, the program helps to build confidence and a sense of identity among participants, which can have positive effects on their overall well-being and academic success. By fostering a strong sense of pride in their Indigenous culture, “Land-Based Love” plays a crucial role in empowering the next generation of Indigenous leaders.

Conclusion:

The “Land-Based Love” program is a vital initiative that not only educates students about their cultural heritage but also empowers them to take pride in their identity. Through hands-on activities and teachings that are deeply rooted in Indigenous traditions, the program ensures that cultural knowledge is preserved and passed on to future generations. As it continues to grow, “Land-Based Love” will remain an essential resource for Indigenous youth, helping them to navigate the challenges of the modern world while staying connected to their cultural roots.



Land-Based Learning Teachers Kyla Shields and Kevin Kaiser

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department Our Progress

Indigenous Grad Retreat - Time of *kc'a?c'a?ltan*

Time of Cold Weather The Indigenous Education Department was pleased to host the first Indigenous Grad Retreat of the year on December 14, 2023. The day was facilitated by heart speaker Justin Young, aka Thunder Sky, who brought the good medicine of laughter and joy to each Indigenous student while teaching about empowerment through cultural identity.



Elder in Residence Maureen Ziprick started the day by welcoming the students to the territory and sharing words from her heart. Justin Young then shared his life journey as a resilient Indigenous man and how his path has led him to encourage others to build their dreams.

OKM students Ben Lupul and Emmalise Pickles, shared that they found the circle facilitated by Justin to be incredibly **“impactful.”** Their favourite part of the day was **“learning about each other, growing from their discomfort, and getting out of their comfort zones.”** They said they experienced a lot of wisdom and felt very lucky to get to be there with Elder Mo and Justin. After seeing Justin speak, they felt they had gained

a deeper knowledge of themselves and of what they want to accomplish in life.



Indigenous Grad Retreat - Time of *kpux'əx'tan*

Time of Snow Drifting The Indigenous Education Department was excited to host their second Indigenous Graduate Retreat of the year on February 29, 2024. The intention of this retreat was to provide Indigenous graduates with their own personal medicine bundle. The medicine bundles included local sage, sweet grass, and cedar. These are sacred medicines used by many Indigenous people for traditional healing and ceremonies. The students were gifted an abalone shell of their choosing and a wooden box to safely store their medicines and shell.

The students began their day with Bannock and the option to smudge with Elder Randy. Elder Randy spoke about the importance of sacred medicine by stating, ***“You have all been chosen to do something special in your life. Creator gave us medicines to help when it becomes too much.”***

After a lunch of sandwiches and a song from Elder Randy, students had the opportunity to paint their wooden medicine boxes. Inspiration was drawn from famous Indigenous art that was displayed around the room as well as the Indigenous student's own personal ideas.



Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department

Our Progress

Indigenous Blanketing Ceremonies

Although the District's Indigenous Graduation Rate continues to improve, we recognize that there is still work to do in order for each Indigenous student to realize their potential and graduate with dignity, purpose, and options. The District is committed to continuing to increase transition rates, Kindergarten to grade 12, as well as garner greater clarity on the success of Indigenous students transitioning to post-secondary learning opportunities.



Every year, the Indigenous Education Department has the pleasure of hosting five Blanketing Ceremonies to honour all Indigenous graduates as they embark on their next chapter in life. This year, 253 Indigenous graduates were wrapped in love by parents, guardians, friends, Advocates, community, and school staff as they shared in the excitement of their loved one's success. These blanketing ceremonies are not just an academic milestone but also powerful affirmations of resilience, community support, and cultural pride. They reflect the collective effort of the community to nurture and empower youth, instilling a sense of belonging and identity rooted in Indigenous traditions and values.

At each Blanketing Ceremony, Métis community members gifted Métis graduates with a sash as a way to honour their achievements. The Métis sash is a symbol of pride, identity, and heritage, reflecting the rich traditions of the Métis community. **There were approximately 100 Métis graduates this year.**

The opening ceremonies commenced with an Elder who offered a heartfelt welcome to the traditional territory. Following this, introductions were made, bridging community and dignitaries in attendance. A moment of silence ensued, honoring the enduring legacy of residential school students. Following the moment of silence, dancers in vibrant regalia moved gracefully, their every step a tribute to the resilience and survival of residential school survivors. As the rhythmic beat of drums filled the air, their movements spoke of healing, strength, and cultural pride. The ceremony then included the Medicine Wheel Awards, recognizing Indigenous graduates who exemplified exceptional growth and balance across the spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional quadrants. Finally, with grace and humility, the Indigenous valedictorian stepped forward, first adorned with the honour of a ceremonial sash, symbolizing their achievement and leadership followed by their speech of hope and aspiration, encapsulating the spirit of resilience and unity that characterized the event.

Following the opening ceremony, an Elder blessed the food as families shared a meal which added a warm, communal touch to the celebration. Conversations flowed freely as stories of the Indigenous graduate's journey unfolded, well wishes were shared, and future plans were discussed.

As the night drew to a gentle close, the graduates formed a circle where their loved ones stood behind, wrapping them in a blanket of love, support, and ancestral wisdom. This act, steeped in tradition and significance, marked the culmination of years of hard work and achievement. In this shared moment of celebration and connection, the ceremony gracefully concluded with words from an Elder followed by a Round Dance, leaving an indelible mark of pride, accomplishment, and togetherness on all who attended.



RSS graduate, Tristan Couillonneur

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Equity in Action - Indigenous Education Department Our Progress



Westbank First Nation Chief Robert Louie and Council Members
L-R Jordan Coble, Andrea Alexander, Angie Derrickson,
Sara Tronson with WFN MBSS graduates,
L-R Charley Lindley-Manchester, Madison Jack,
Soraya Auger, Rylan Sundstrom, Lee McDougall



George Elliott Secondary
Graduate Clover Steele



KSS Graduate Ethan Lee-Weget

Okanagan Mission Secondary
Graduate Presley Hopf



Round Dance at Central Programs
Blanketing Ceremony

Each Indigenous Blanketing Ceremony reflected the Indigenous student graduates' wishes as well as the unique context of each school culture. Five Blanket Ceremonies were held at secondary schools and at Central Programs and Services during the months of May and June 2024.

"Being wrapped in a blanket is one of the highest honours one can receive in the Indigenous community and is a custom that is shared by many nations across Turtle Island. This recognition is a reminder of one's responsibility within their community and throughout life's journey."

Jordan Coble, Westbank First Nation

Central Okanagan Public Schools

Our Priorities for the 2024/2025 School Year

The following Priorities will be a focus during Year Five of Equity in Action for Truth and Reconciliation:

- Collaborate with local Indigenous communities, school teams, and community to re-story the next Equity in Action Agreement for Truth and Reconciliation Agreement (2025-2030);
- Implement culturally-responsive wellness practices to support the well-being of students, staff, and families;
- Strengthen relationships with parents/caregivers and community to engage families and give voice.

Additionally, a focus will remain on continuing to:

- Explore pathways for Indigenous youth to be role models for younger Indigenous students;
- Collaborate with school teams to re-imagine Indigenous student transition plans with a focus on culturally-responsive transitions from elementary to middle schools;
- Collaborate with local Indigenous communities to re-imagine the District's Indigenous Education Cultural Offerings (K-12);
- Collaborate with District teams to support inter-cultural competency learning and anti-racism advocacy for staff and students;
- Broaden culturally-responsive interventions as an alternative to students on suspensions or adjusted school schedules;
- Implementing Year Three of Westbank First Nation and Central Okanagan Public Schools Local Education Agreement (2022-2027);
- Implementing Year Four of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Grant Project: Co-Curricular Making: Honouring Indigenous Connections to Land, Culture and the Relational Self.



This was supported by research undertaken through a Partnership Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. For more information, please use this [link](#)

