

NEW TEACHER MENTORING PROJECT IS A LIFE-LINE FOR NEW TEACHERS

Issue 01 Success Stories

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Surrey District Principal Kevin Fadum and New Teacher Mentoring Project Coordinator Alison Davies

By Christopher Sun, Writer
British Columbia School Trustees Association

Barely a month into her first teaching job, Kaitlyn Freer wrote her resignation letter.

The Victoria-native received her teaching degree from Vancouver Island University in the spring of 2013 and started her first teaching position soon after in Chetwynd. Excitement from moving to a new place and starting a new career soon turned into shock, self-doubt and depression. She had a rambunctious Grade 6 and 7 split class with 10 of the 28 students on the extreme end of unruliness.

“For the first couple of months I thought I was not cut out for this,” Freer said, recounting the behavioural problems that affected one-third of her students. “I was asking anyone and everyone to please help me. I [figuratively] had a help wanted sign outside my classroom. I was crying for help and I wasn’t getting any. I didn’t have the experience, I felt in over my head; I was done.”

Freer handed in her resignation letter in October and received a phone call the next day from a union representative, telling her she should not have quit. A meeting was soon held, the resignation letter was withdrawn and Freer started getting some help, but it wasn't enough.

"I had people come in from the school district thinking they can get through to the students and they didn't," Freer said, explaining a person who came in for just one day. "They came in, realized how difficult it was, said good luck and that was it.

"Having somebody there on a regular basis would have been very helpful."

Freer was embarrassed and felt like a failure professionally for having an unwieldy class. A class that on-call teachers dreaded teaching. She was somewhat comforted when experienced teachers said it wasn't her fault, acknowledging that she had a lot of exceptionally challenging students. A retired teacher working as a TOC approached Freer near the end of her first year teaching about a provincial new teacher mentorship program. When he offered to mentor her, she jumped on it.

"I said sure, that's exactly what I've been needing," Freer said, now teaching middle school in Fort St. John and entering her third year in the profession. If it wasn't for the mentorship program, I wouldn't be [currently] teaching."

The New Teacher Mentoring Project began in 2012, with the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, UBC and BC School Superintendents Association collaborating together, with a four-year grant of about \$1.5 million from the Ministry of Education. The project aims to provide sustainable support to new teachers, standardize new teacher mentoring in the province, and also bring in mentoring programs in districts that didn't have them and strengthen them in others. Project co-ordinator Alison Davies said 34 of the 60 school districts now have some kind of mentorship in place and her goal is to see it in all of them.

"We've never had, in B.C., a cohesive, provincial approach to help support new teachers," Davies said. "Mentorship has grown in different school districts but it has taken off mostly in the Lower Mainland in the last 10 years."

Mentorship involves matching a new and experienced teacher together, and it's not a one way, top-down structure, Davies explained. An experienced teacher can provide advice on how to deal with classroom problems, prepare report cards and offer professional support. In return, a new teacher can teach the experienced colleague about social media and current technology. Mentoring requires release time so teachers can observe each other's teaching style in their respective classrooms, which costs school districts money and resources. However, Davies said this is a small investment to keep teachers.

"Teachers already meet informally but we do know a more formal program makes a huge difference to how effective the mentorship is," Davies said. "One thing that makes the biggest difference in the quality of education is the quality of the teachers. We really need to support our teachers."

The provincial grant has allowed additional funding for districts interested in the mentorship project and in its first year, the project focused on schools outside Metro Vancouver and on communities that may not have the budget to do it. In the first year, Haida Gwaii, Kootenay-Columbia and Kamloops/Thompson school districts were chosen to participate in the mentorship program. This later expanded to Sooke, Sea to Sky and Peace River North the next year and then Stikine, Vancouver Island West, Peace River South, North Okanagan-Shuswap, and Revelstoke in year three and four. There are

now 15 people sitting on five regional teams, offering new teacher mentorship resources to school districts throughout the province.

Kevin Fadum is a district principal in Surrey and is charged with hiring new teachers. B.C.'s most populous school district cost shares new teacher mentoring with the teachers' association, 50-50.

"We believe you don't learn everything you need to know in teacher training," Fadum said. "A university can't teach you the cultural difference between teaching in Bella Coola and in the city."

Fadum said 90 per cent of the new teachers he interviews asks him about what kind of mentorship opportunities Surrey provides and he's proud that his school district puts a large emphasis on it. The mentorship program also helps in recruiting the best teachers.

"It's a competitive edge," Fadum said. "Mentorship does cost us money but it helps us build capacity and keep talent in the school district."

While only a few school districts in B.C. are currently seeing growth in its student population, a teacher shortage is in the forecast, making the competitive edge even more important.

"We are at the bottom of the decline in student population and we are now starting the incline," Davies said, adding teachers retiring will also cause a spike in hiring. "We anticipate that across B.C., there will be a demand for teachers and we need to ensure new teachers can move into those positions."

Studies have shown that anywhere from 30 to 50 per cent of new teachers leave the profession after five years, and Fadum feels having a mentorship program would help lessen the disillusionment that many new teachers experience.

"Teachers are highly educated and their skills are valuable in other professions," Fadum said. "Mentorship programs will help keep them in teaching."

Provincial funding for the New Teacher Mentoring Project ends in June 2016. Fadum and Davies hope the Ministry of Education will continue to provide funding for the program, while Freer would like to see it both continued and expanded.

"Right now, mentorship is only for new teachers in their first two years," Freer said. "It should also be available to teachers who change teaching assignments.

"In Chetwynd and in Moberly Lake, I was teaching Grades 6 and 7, but in this new assignment in Fort St. John, I'm teaching middle school. It's a total change."

Freer hopes to continue participating in the mentorship program, even though she is now in her third year of teaching. She found a colleague at her new school who is teaching the same grade level in a neighbouring classroom, and is willing to mentor her. However, if they can't formally participate in the mentorship program, they may try figuring something out between the two of them.

"Mentorship definitely saved my career," Freer said, adding she loves what she does and things are extremely better now than three years ago. "I don't know what I would be doing if I left teaching."

For more information about this story, contact Heather McKenzie-Beck at hmckenziebeck@bcsta.org.

TRUSTEE ACADEMY 2015

Issue 01 News & Events

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Authentic Governance for Student Achievement: Boards Matter!

“The greatest and most inspiring mountain climbing achievements in history are not so much stories of individual achievement, but are stories of the extraordinary power of a unified, talented, prepared team that stays loyally committed to one another and to their shared vision to the end.”

–Stephen Covey

Please join us November 26-28 in Vancouver, BC, for our 2015 Trustee Academy.

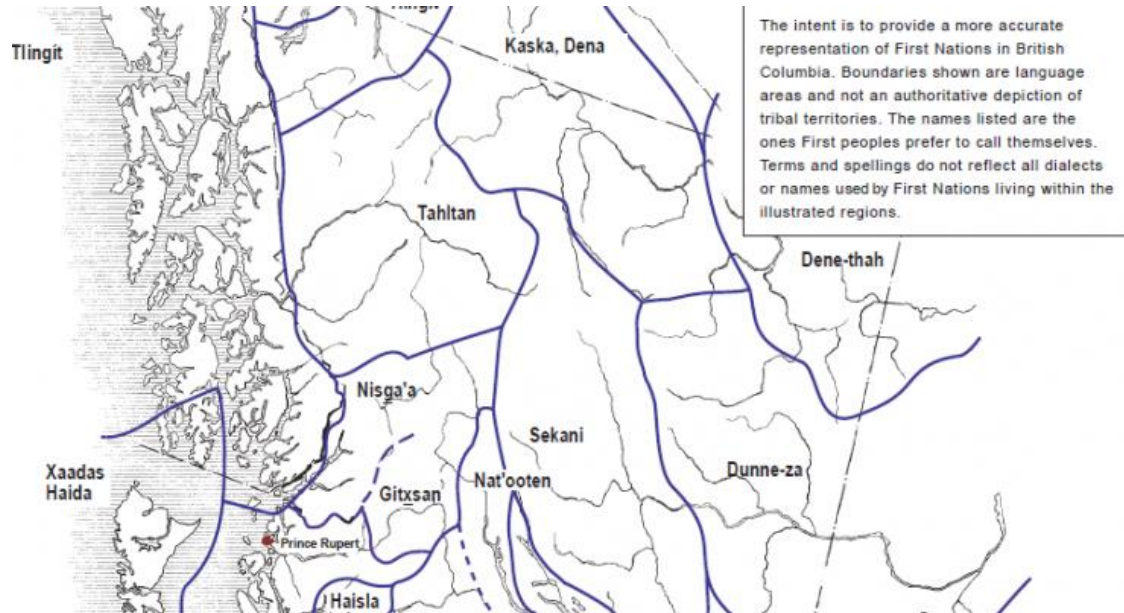
The theme of this year’s BCSTA Trustee Academy is education transformation and how we can facilitate the adoption of important changes across our school districts. We recognize that while school trustees have a part to play in this process, it will be classroom teachers and parents who are most connected in maintaining our leading-edge results for students and meeting their needs in future years. We would love to have you there to share in this professional development opportunity.

We are proud to announce that we will be hosting an opening presentation by world-renowned educator and transformation guide Yong Zhao on the first night of Academy, Thursday November 26. For this, and more details, please see our preliminary program online.

ABORIGINAL TERRITORIES MAPS

Aboriginal Education Issue 01 Resources

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By Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada

The maps below indicate the location of BC First Nation communities, the approximate boundaries of traditional territories and the rich diversity of First Nations cultures in British Columbia.

[AANDC Map of First Nations in British Columbia \[PDF\]](#)

This map shows the geographic location of the main community of each BC First Nation, as well as the major towns and cities in the province. Produced by AANDC.

[First Nations Map \[PDF\]](#)

This map shows the geographic location of the BC First Nations. Provided by Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia.

Published with permission from the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

ENGAGE YOUR STUDENTS IN THE 2015 FEDERAL ELECTION WITH STUDENT VOTE

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By Student Vote

This October, more than 6,000 schools and 700,000 students from across Canada are expected to take part in the largest student parallel election ever conducted.

Student Vote is a hands-on learning program that gives students under the voting age an opportunity to experience the voting process firsthand and build the habits of informed and engaged citizenship.

Students learn about government and the electoral process, and research the issues, parties and candidates through classroom learning, media consumption, family dialogue and school-wide events. The program culminates with an authentic vote where students take on the roles of election officials and cast ballots on the election candidates running in their school's riding. The Student Vote results are shared with the media for broadcast and publication following the close of the official polls.

The next Student Vote program will take place in conjunction with the 2015 federal election scheduled for October 19, 2015. The program is free and open to all schools in the country.

Registered schools will receive educational resources, posters, riding maps, ballots and ballot boxes.

Learn more by visiting www.studentvote.ca or calling toll free: 1-866-488-8775.

MERRITT SECONDARY'S CARVED MODEL CANOE

Aboriginal Education Issue 01 Success Stories

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By SD58 (Nicola-Similkameen)

A local First Nation forest company in market logging and forest management, "Stuwix" located and provided us with a fir log for us to carve a model canoe, which will be placed at Merritt Secondary School for display.

A local Nlaka'pamux carver, Alfred Snow, originally from our local First Nations community (Shackan Band) and a couple of helpers demonstrated the process of carving a model canoe to put on display. There were some classes and community members that observed parts of the process. Having the canoe and other First Nations displays give all students a sense of pride in recognizing the importance and relevance of the local First Nations people's which are the Okanagan (Syilx) and nte?kepmxcin(Thompson) people.

We also purchased a 29-foot canoe that youth and community members can learn to canoe pull. We plan to develop local curriculum on the history of the local canoes used where students will learn more about the local First Nations history.



Creating a Model Canoe for Merrit Secondary School



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Creating a Model Canoe for Merrit Secondary School

For more information about this story, contact Shelley Oppenheim-Lacerte, District Principal – Aboriginal Education, SD58 (Nicola-Similkameen) at so-lacerte@sd58.bc.ca

ABORIGINAL SPACES: A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT FOR ABORIGINAL LEARNERS

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Salmon Arm Secondary School (SAS) graduate Ilesha Johnny and SD83 District Principal Aboriginal Education Irene LaBoucane

By Alice Hucul, Communications
SD83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap)

A safe, welcoming room which enhances Aboriginal learners' sense of belonging in schools is just one of the reasons why Board Chair Bobbi Johnson of the SD83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap) put forward a motion that there should be a designated space for an Aboriginal Education room within all new schools built in BC. Johnson initiated a motion with the Aboriginal Education Committee for the BC School Trustees Association in February, who passed it. The committee took the motion to the BCSTA AGM in April, where trustees passed it and are now recommending it for consideration to the Ministry of Education.

But why is this necessary?

"When I go into the Aboriginal education rooms in our district I see some of our most vulnerable students being supported. They are a great place of learning. The people that staff the rooms are doing wonderful thing to help kids," said Johnson.

Ilesha Johnny, who graduated from Salmon Arm Secondary School (SAS) in June, was a frequent user of the Aboriginal Education room at SAS. "It was a quiet place to work and study," she said.

Johnny commented that last year she also was able to use the room to come in and build a 3D model of a day care for her Human Services 12 course. Also, she said, if anyone was not feeling well or down they could come to the room and cuddle "Ollie" a stuffed, scented elephant.

SD83 District Principal Aboriginal Education Irene LaBoucane, who is just completing two years of research on Aboriginal student success explains that, generally speaking and despite steps to address it, Aboriginal students do not always find schools to be welcoming environments that reflect who they are as Aboriginal learners.

"Aboriginal Education rooms provide students a safe and welcoming place to gather, which enhances their sense of belonging in public schools," explains LaBoucane. "These rooms are a venue for Aboriginal students to access academic and socio-economic support as well as cultural opportunities which reflect the Aboriginal world views of students. Aboriginal staff ensure programs and services are provided to Aboriginal learners in order to increase their overall achievement."

In other words, it's a place to focus on building a culture of belonging and respect in the school, while meeting emotional and learning needs.

She added that it is important to note that Aboriginal Education rooms are not exclusive to Aboriginal learners, but provide a space where Aboriginal students can bring their friends and share their pride and their culture.

Stepping beyond students' needs, Aboriginal Education rooms also provide parents and community a place they can call their own.

LaBoucane's research, which included doing interviews of Aboriginal students who recently graduated with a Dogwood and asking them what supports helped them successfully navigate the school system, shows that the Aboriginal education room and support worker were often cited as being key supports.

Based on the provincial six-year completion rates (2013/14) there continues to be a substantial achievement gap of 24 per cent between Aboriginal and the non-aboriginal students. This in itself speaks to the ongoing support needs of Aboriginal students which are addressed within Aboriginal Education rooms within schools.

Research findings, including that done by Fulford (2007) and Bell (2004), indicate the importance of schools providing a secure and welcoming climate for Aboriginal students as a means of ensuring success for Aboriginal learners.

"It has been said, that what is good for Aboriginal learners is good for all students, however, what is good for all learners does not necessarily benefit Aboriginal students. Therefore, the need for Aboriginal Education rooms address the "why" of creating a safe and welcoming environment where Aboriginal learners can access academic, social, cultural support," says LaBoucane.

For more information about this story, you may contact Alice Hucul at ahucul@sd83.bc.ca.