STUDENT REFUGEES MAKE A NEW START IN ABBOTSFORD SCHOOLS

Issue 14 Success Stories

March 30, 2017

Twenty-five Syrian families came to Abbotsford as of February 22, 2016. Twenty-two of the families arrived as Government Sponsored Refugees (GARS) and three families came as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRS). In total, there were 116 children and 59 parents; 96 were school-aged children (k-12) with 10 pre-k's who registered for kindergarten in September, 2016. The families were processed in terms of documentation, health screening and immunization and other pertinent information. Several new families arrived in the fall of 2016 and Abbotsford expects more in 2017.

The Abbotsford School District designed a detailed plan for the successful integration of these students and families to minimize further stress and anxiety. School registrations was done at a local hotel and parent information and orientation sessions were held to welcome the newcomers and inform them of the school system. These presentations were conducted with images and pictures with the assistance of Arabic translators, so that parents could get a brief overview of the school system.

A three-day orientation session was held for the students. They were placed in groups of 10 and district teachers began language assessments and introduced students to basic routines through easy and fun art and craft activities.

Because these students came with difficult experiences, trauma and displacement, the district decided to gently ease their transition into schools. As a result, five new sheltered immersion classes were created in schools at each level: one secondary class, one middle school class and three elementary classes. Before commencing academic work, the initial focus was on the students' well-being, sense of safety and belonging, understanding of routines, learning how schools work and district behavioral expectations.

Students received intensive language training from March to June. The teachers of these short-term classes received special training on working with refugee children. As the students became more comfortable, they began to join the regular students for recess and lunch, then school assemblies, events and even courses. Ongoing training was provided to classroom teachers, specialist teachers, vice-principals and principals on cultural competency and awareness and what supports were appropriate for this particular group. Parent training was simultaneously provided about the school system and its expectations. Additionally, all school district counsellors attended a full day training session with a specialist from the Vancouver Association for the Survivors of Torture (VAST) in Vancouver, so that they would approach needs for this group in an informed and sensitive manner.

Almost all of the Syrian refugee students were enrolled in summer school and transportation was provided by the district. In the fall, all the newcomer students were enrolled in their catchment area schools and fully integrated into regular classes.

In response to the newest additions to the classroom, an unidentified Abbotsford School District Grade 4 teacher stated the following. "The three Syrian girls in my class have made a real positive impact on the rest of my students. My class have become more understanding and aware of other cultures. They have learned to respect their differences while realizing that even though they may dress differently, eat different food than them and speak a different language, they are not all that different from them. My students have become compassionate about their situation and realize to be thankful for the safety and stable life they have in Canada. My 3 Syrian girls are all important members of our class community."

Schools are reporting that students are adjusting well and learning with great enthusiasm. Challenges exist; these newcomers still need support in many aspects. However, the staff in all departments of the Abbotsford School District, Abbotsford Community Services, Settlement Workers and Arabic translators have pulled together to provide comprehensive wrap around services for these families.

Writer: Kevin Godden, Superintendent of Schools, School District 34 (Abbotsford)

BULKLEY VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT SEES SUCCESS WITH BC'S NEW CURRICULUM

Issue 14 Success Stories

 March 30, 2017

The Bulkley Valley School District's redesigned curriculum was initially rolled out with grades K-9 in school year 2015/2016, with the goal of providing students with current, relevant skills that reflect the ever-changing demands of our society.

Part of B.C.'s new curriculum put an increased focus on trades and skill based opportunities for students. An example of this new form of learning can be seen in "Maker Days," where students are encouraged to build and create. Fast becoming a valued cornerstone of the new curriculum, the results have been successful in terms of both engagement, and the development of abilities and skills in students.

Recently, a school in the community of Houston, B.C. found great success with a competition based on wooden pallets. Students were provided with surplus pallets, along with instruction to deconstruct pallets and repurpose the materials in to new items. Students were quoted as saying "it's the most fun I have ever had in school", and educators share the enthusiasm.

"Engagement is through the roof," said Board Chair Les Kearns. "There are great connections being made, and the learning outcomes are positive."

Subplots also abound in the implementation of the updated curriculum, with encouraging stories arising in unexpected ways. An example of such a story occurred during the facilitation of a woodworking program with students. A learner in the sessions had the opportunity to become a leader and share his knowledge, as he had previously completed many woodworking projects with his father at home. The boy was able to leverage his personal experience and share his knowledge with his peers, and gain experience as a sharer of knowledge.

Other areas of focus include coding and robotics, with student engagement being so high that courses cannot be offered with enough frequency to satiate demand. Engagement opportunities such as this did not exist in the previous curriculum, and boards of education are pleased with the results.

In leading up to these learning initiatives, teachers are encouraged to collaborate. Co-planning and co-teaching classes, with lessons first being exhibited and observed by peers for feedback, is the norm. The results of this approach have created powerful demonstrations where students are afforded the opportunity to view their teachers as learners as well, resulting in a lasting impression of what is to be a lifelong learner.

Feedback from educators, boards, and parents has been positive in the school district, with genuine appreciation for the opportunity to teach children transferable skills being apparent. These efforts render into increased engagement from teachers, echoing the positive attitudes and interest seen in their students.

"Bringing in the experts, putting that work into practice and making use of our own in-house experts is just the beginning," added Kearns in speaking about educating students with practical skills. "There is long way to go, but this is limitless in its potential."

A GUIDE TO HOSTING AN ALL-CANDIDATES' MEETING

Issue 14 Public Education is the Key Resources

March 30, 2017

During an election, there can be a lot of information for voters to absorb— candidate names, topical issues, and party positions may start to overwhelm you (and your social media feed) if you aren't able to put everything in context. One way to make the issues more relevant to you and fellow constituents is by organizing an all-candidates' meeting (ACM) in your community. Bringing candidates together under one roof will help provide awareness to local voters about where each candidate stands on the issues that matter most to your area.

Why are ACMs useful?

At an all-candidates' meeting, candidates running for office will respond to questions from the event organizers as well as from the public audience. Encouraging this kind of political dialogue on a local level will give constituents a chance to engage with the individuals running for office on a deeper level; it also allows attendees to consider important issues and questions that may not have occurred to them previously.

How do I organize a meeting?

Organizing an all-candidates' meeting doesn't have to be difficult. To make things as easy as possible, we've put together a step-by-step guide to help you get the ball rolling.

Note that this planning template is intended as a guide only and is expected to require adaptation to meet the needs of your school board and community.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss potential adaptations to meet your needs, please contact BCSTA Media and Communications Specialist Glenda Ollero at gollero@bcsta.org.

The working committee

Establish a working committee that will lead the planning and execution of the ACM. Consider assigning 1 or 2 trustees who are not candidates in the upcoming election to chair or co-chair the committee. Identify volunteers who can help during the event.

Purpose of the committee

To coordinate the logistics and communications involved in hosting an all-candidates' meeting focused on public education issues.

Goals of the project

1. Raise awareness of local and provincial issues in public education with the public and among candidates.
2. Ensure information about local education issues is adequately and accurately represented during the campaign, thereby supporting informed voting.
3. Help boards fulfill their democratic duty to the communities that elected them to represent the interests of local public schools and keep public education in BC strong.

Audience

Elections involve everyone in the community, but to raise awareness of issues in public education, this plan is targeted at the following audiences:

- Candidates
- Parents and students
- School district employees
- Community leaders
- Media

Sources of data to evaluate project effectiveness

1. Attention to local education issues in media campaign coverage
2. Attendance at the all-candidates' meeting by candidates, parents, district employees, community leaders and media
3. Feedback (exit survey, comments from candidates, etc.)

Before the writ is dropped (starting now)

Logistics

1. **Plan** meeting times for the working committee, ideally once a week.
2. **Discuss** the purpose and goals of the all-candidates' meeting and project evaluation strategies.

   Local public education issues to be raised at the all-candidates' meeting. Review BCSTA materials for suggested provincial issues and supplement with local implications.

3. **Establish:**

- o Meeting date – consider an evening in Week 2 of the campaign. Consider media deadlines, competing events and attendee convenience.
- o Location – consider a familiar central location with sufficient space and parking.
- o Moderator – consider the board chair. The moderator should not be affiliated with any political party.
- o Event agenda and format, including timing.
- o Technical requirements (stage set up, microphones, lighting, timer)
- o Photographer/recorder to gather data for the school board. Make sure that you have the proper permissions to record and/or distribute third party materials, photos or videos gathered at the ACM.
- o Post-meeting refreshments.
4. **Identify** volunteers to meet, greet and serve at the meeting, collect surveys, etc.
5. **Meet** with candidates to:
- o Secure commitment
- o Share meeting plans and any prepared materials, including the BCSTA resources
- o Gather background material from candidates (suitable for introductions)
- o Try to accommodate reasonable requests

Communications

1. **Community Relations**
- o Advance letter to employees, parents and community leaders (e.g., send to a key communicator group, district work experience sponsors, committee representatives, principals, union reps)
- o Draft a preview announcement that can be read at community meetings (e.g., service clubs, council meetings, Chamber of Commerce, etc.)
- o Draft invitations for community leaders and prepare a list of invitees
- o Draft an exit survey to be collected from all-candidates meeting attendees
2. **Media Relations**
- o Meet with editors and/or the reporter(s) covering education/election. Outline your plans and ask what they require to maximize coverage.
- o Explain BCSTA's "Public Education is the Key" campaign.
- o Provide media with an advance press release describing the plan for the event.
- o Request live community television or radio coverage of the event.
- o Draft a media release announcing the time, date and location of the event.
3. **Social Media**
- o Facebook: This is a great platform for creating and distributing event invites. Share the ACM invitation among your network and ask that your committee members share it with theirs as well.
- o Twitter: Tweet at local politicians or community members to get people thinking about relevant topics and questions. This will also help attract attention to the event, increasing the list of engaged attendees.

Week 1: Campaign 2017

Logistics

1. **Confirm** date, time, location, moderator, candidate participation.
2. **Finalize** meeting agenda and review with the moderator.
3. **Construct** moderator's notes which include information for introducing candidates and describe the meeting format (including timing).
4. **Review** physical arrangements

- o Ushers/greeters to welcome guests and to distribute and collect exit surveys
- o Reserved seating for media at the front of the room
- o Stage set up – microphones/podium and visible name plates
- o Floor set up – microphones for asking questions, question box for written questions.
5. **Arrange** for photographer/recorder.

Communications

1. **Community Relations**
- o Social media tactics (refer to previous page)
- o Arrange for posters to be displayed on community bulletin boards. Download the ready-to-print "Public Education is the Key" election poster. Consider student and parent volunteers to help with distribution.
- o Announce the event on the district web site.
- o Finalize and photocopy exit survey.
2. **Media Relations**
- o Distribute a press release confirming the location, date and time – direct to education reporters whenever possible. Include student newspapers on your media list.
- o Distribute public service announcements (PSAs) to the media.
- o Arrange with local radio and/or tv for pre- and post-all-candidates' meeting live chat.
3. **Advertising**
- o Confirm ad space bookings and approve final copy.
- o Distribute PSAs to ad managers – even if you have already given them to editorial departments.
- o Consider Election Act rules regarding election advertising.

Week 2: Campaign 2017

Logistics

1. **The Day before the Meeting**
- o Confirm arrangements for:
- o Food/beverages
- o Audio visual
- o Support materials (posters, buttons)
- o Photographer/recorder
- o Post-meeting media interviews
2. **The Day of the Meeting**
- o Post signage as required for parking, meeting room, reserved seats.
- o Meet with volunteer ushers/greeters to go over instructions.
- o Test the audiovisual system to ensure it is working.
- o Review the meeting format, including arrangements for post-meeting media interviews, with the candidates/hosts.

Communications

3. **Community Relations** – Finalize arrangements, as above.
4. **Media Relations**
- o Phone reporters the day before the meeting to remind them of the time/place.

- o Contact radio/TV stations to confirm PSAs will run on the day of the event.
- o Assign an individual to greet reporters. Have sufficient handouts set aside for the media. The media may require:
- ▪ media feeds, if possible
- ▪ a moment for photo ops
- ▪ identification of key individuals
- ▪ information on meeting timing and post-meeting interview opportunities.

Week 3: Campaign 2017

Logistics

Debriefing meeting with committee.

- Review goals and results.
- Review media clips.
- Collate and summarize exit survey.

Communications

1. **Community Relations –** Distribute summary article for inclusion in school newsletters.
2. **Media Relations**
- o Letter to the editor thanking community for participation in the all-candidates meeting and encouraging people to vote.
- o Thank you notes to reporters for their support in promoting and covering the event.
- o Follow up media release. If an exit survey was conducted, use this information as the basis for a final press release.
3. **Social Media –** Run thank you posts on social media feeds

Post-Election

Logistics

Submit report to the board.

Communications

1. **Community Relations**
o Letter to all candidates congratulating them on their participation in the provincial election campaign.
o Letter to all volunteers that assisted with the ACM.
o Letter or website posting to employees, parents, community leaders discussing the feedback received on public education issues at the all-candidates meeting and describing how the board is working on addressing these issues.
o Consider ways of communicating with the MLAs in your area about education matters after the election.
2. **Media Relations –** Keep media contacts updated on the status of key issues raised at the ACM.

Potential Cost Items

Logistics

1. **Facility rental** – if school facilities are not used
2. **Equipment rental** – if school facilities are not used or if additional equipment is required
3. **Light refreshments** – coffee, tea and snacks

Communications

1. **Printing**
o flyers
o posters
o exit surveys
2. **Advertising** (varies significantly locally)
o community newspaper display ads
o television

STUDENT VOTE: BUILDING FUTURE CITIZENS

Issue 14 Issue 15 Resources

March 30, 2017

Teachers play a vital role in building future citizens. Preparing young Canadians for the voting process can – and should – start at an early age.

Student Vote is a parallel election for students under the voting age coinciding with general elections. Students learn about government and the electoral process, research the political parties and platforms, discuss relevant issues and cast ballots for the official election candidates. The Student Vote results are shared publicly and with the media for broadcast and publication.

The Student Vote program applies the concept of the 'teachable moment' and uses the election as a springboard for discussing current affairs and practicing the skills and competencies of responsible citizenship. The real-life aspect of the parallel election enhances their interest to learn, discuss issues and become acquainted with the process. The publication of the Student Vote results allows students to feel that their voice matters and that they are part of something larger than their school.

"This has had a profound effect on my students and their families. The frequency with which students are following the media, discussing current events and demonstrating a commitment to being active citizens is amazing." (Student Vote Team Leader, British Columbia, 2015 federal election)

An independent evaluation commissioned by Elections Canada found that Student Vote had a positive impact on student knowledge and understanding of politics and elections, on their interest and confidence in discussing politics and on their future voting intentions. The program was also found to foster dialogue and learning about the election at home, and 28 per cent of parents surveyed said their child's participation positively impacted their decision to vote.

CIVIX will be offering Student Vote for the 2017 provincial election in partnership with Elections BC and with support from the Vancouver Foundation and the Government of Canada.

Registration for Student Vote BC is open until Friday, April 21. Participating schools receive educational resources, posters, ballots, ballot boxes and voting screens. The program is offered at no cost and open to all schools in the province.

Schools can sign up today by visiting www.studentvote.ca/bc2017 or by calling 1-866-488-8775.