

## FINDING CREATIVE WAYS FOR STUDENTS TO PURSUE THEIR PASSIONS LOCALLY

Issue 04 Resources Success Stories

January 28, 2016



by Chris Kennedy  
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Culture of Yes

It is hard to believe that one of the key tasks of January is to begin promoting our program offerings in our schools next September. This past month, our Board approved a series of new secondary school courses and programs. It is exciting to see a culture of innovation come to life in the program offerings that teachers, principals and schools are bringing forward – I absolutely love the passion-based offerings for students.

We have been offering academy programs for just over a decade. It started with hockey and soccer. For many years, students interested in a particular academy program would have to transfer to one of our high schools to participate. We have changed this over time.

About four years ago, we began to talk about the idea of “one district, three campuses.” This is based on the principle that students should be able to attend their local secondary school with their friends, but have access to programs for part of their schedule at another site. It has not been a simple move. There have been logistics to overcome – calendars had to be aligned so high schools all had the same professional development days. Timetables also had to be coordinated. In our case, we now have timetables at each of our high schools where the blocks in the morning rotate and the afternoon blocks are fixed. So students have the same last period class each day. This allows us to bring together students from multiple sites each day in the afternoon.

Our school schedules are built so students can complete core areas in the morning, and if interested, pursue specialty programming in the afternoon.

This coming year we now have 10 different academy-style programs open to students from all schools. We continue to be strong with sports – offering academy programming in soccer, hockey, basketball, baseball, rugby, field hockey, and tennis. We have also now added mechatronics robotics and dance for next year. The majority of these programs occur in the afternoon, with some classes before school and on weekends. In addition to these programs we have several courses that are open to students from all schools – YELL (an entrepreneurship program that runs after school and partners students with business leaders in the community, FAST (First Aid Swim Training, where students earn credentialing towards becoming a lifeguard) and a District Honour Choir (that practices in the evening and performs locally and beyond). In Art West 45 students can attend their own high school one day and every other day participate in a program that allows those passionate about arts to get extended time in this area. It is the same principle for ACE-IT Carpentry where students attend the program every other day working towards their Level 1 carpentry credential.

In all we are now at about 15 and growing in the number of options we have available that allow students to pursue their passions as part of their school program – coming together with students from across the district who share these interests.

There is wonderful value in students attending their local school but we also need to find creative ways for students to pursue their passions. Five years ago none of the programs existed that would allow students from a variety of schools to attend. Now they are part of our culture. A culture where talented teachers share their passions with students who are thirsty to pursue these areas.

I am not sure that what we are doing is transforming our system. I can hear my friend Yong Zhao in my ear that we are maximizing the current system and not changing the system. We are continuing to find ways for students to pursue their passions which is all part of building a system that is relevant, connected and engaging for our learners.

## **NISGA'A SCHOOL DISTRICT CELEBRATES FORTY YEARS OF IMPACTING ABORIGINAL EDUCATION IN CANADA**

Aboriginal Education Issue 04 News & Events

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The creation of School District 92 on January 1, 1976, was a historic event for native education in Canada. It occurred as a result of one hundred years of effort by the Nisgá'a people to gain control over their educational destiny. Very early after their contact with the European culture the Nisgá'as realized that it was essential to understand the white man's ways in order to deal with him successfully. Therefore, in conjunction with their Land Claim Settlement, the Nisgá'as pressed for their own school system – to allow their children to be educated in a bilingual-bicultural environment.

As a result of their efforts, a new school district was created by the province of B.C. for the Nisgá'a People. Initially, the Board consisted of Mr. Alvin A. McKay. Through his efforts, in consultation with leaders from Kincolith, Greenville, Canyon City, Aiyansh and Nass Camp, schools were built in three villages and five group homes (student residences) were built in Aiyansh in 1976. During 1977 School Trustees were elected from the five villages.

On January 19, the 2016 Nisgá'a School District Board of Education passed a motion to honour and thank the visionary Nisgá'a leaders who accomplished this unique and historically important development by kicking off a year long 40 Anniversary Celebration.

Elders, students, schools, guests and all our communities will be invited to join district employees in celebration events throughout the year, culminating in a major Celebration next fall.

In acknowledging this historic milestone the Board of Education also committed to return to a focus on the Foundation Educational Philosophy of the Elders of the Nisga'a Nation, which stated:

Ts'im gan wilaak'ils wil luu sgihl gandidils

“ Within one's search for knowledge (education),  
therein one will find the true meaning of life”

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Credits: Original 1976 Nisgha School District Pamphlet

## SHORT FILMS SHOWCASE STUDENT LEARNING AT ARROW LAKES SCHOOL DISTRICT

Aboriginal Education Issue 04 Resources Success Stories

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by Terry Taylor  
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SD10 (Arrow Lakes)

How do you build teacher capacity, share innovative practices across your district, and communicate about student and professional learning to parents, community, students, educators and the world outside your own school district? Creating short video examples of teaching and learning is one of the ways that SD10 (Arrow Lakes) has discovered we can make a difference.

So — Welcome to SD 10!

In “small-is-amazing” School District 10, a growing collection of eight- to 10-minute films showcase student learning and teacher professional learning. The films are helping the district define its narrative, showcase its vision and talents, and broaden its impact. For example, our district’s signature pedagogy is place-conscious learning— yet how this pedagogical vision is manifested changes depending on the learners, the teachers, the school and the community context. The film, *Mountains as Teachers*, illustrates engaged students and their innovative teacher from Lucerne Elementary Secondary School in New Denver as they connect learning about science, social studies, language arts and social responsibility in wilderness environments of the mountain culture that surrounds us.

In a similar vein, Edgewood School’s primary program entitled *Walking Wednesdays* demonstrates K-3 students and their talented teacher integrating 2.5 hour weekly walks into the local environment surrounding the school. This multi-aged primary class creates learning opportunities which integrate visual art, writing, science, math and social studies. The students’ “Thinking Trees” in the Enchanted

Forests surrounding the school allow each student a personalized space for mindfulness practice, play and learning.

In Reconciliation Through Art, a cross-district initiative weaves learning from diverse indigenous artists in K-12 classrooms across the district. Elders and artists work with teachers and students carving, storytelling, weaving with cedar bark, and dancing – to enhance all our students’ understanding about Aboriginal cultures, and about residential schools and their impact on Aboriginal peoples and on Canada.

The film, Outdoor Education and Entrepreneurship showcases how place-consciousness and outdoor learning with Grade 10-12 students at Nakusp Secondary and Burton Academy results in students learning cross-curricular skills in outdoor education and in building a small business. Students earn their Ground Search and Rescue, First Aid, and SuperHost certifications as they develop business plans and marketing strategies, and design and manufacture fishing flashers. Each year, the students sell their product at the Vancouver Boat Show and earn kudos for their business acumen and their resourcefulness, as well as the leadership of their committed teacher.

Innovations in district literacy practice which integrate Information Technology skills and digital citizenship are highlighted in two of the district films to date: Facebook Literature Circles and Rocking the Page. Both initiatives connect learners with one another using digital technology as they enhance their skills in reading, writing and communication.

Facebook Literature Circles connects two secondary classrooms in the district using Facebook as the platform. Students and their forward-thinking teachers discuss books centering on the theme of identity in online literature circles. While integrated in the learning, students also explore their digital identity and learn about online privacy and respectful ways to converse online.

Rocking the Page is about Grade 4-12 students and a cadre of professional writers from across BC and as far away as Ontario, connecting with students to inspire a joy of writing. The student and professional writers use WordPress as a platform for posting work and getting professional feedback on their writing. The film highlights how student writing improves as students and their dynamic teachers from three schools in SD 10 and two schools from other districts and the professional writers become a powerful connected learning community. Check out the project blog!

Another way in which our films capture innovative practice is by documenting our teachers’ professional learning journeys. Student Inquiry shows how one teacher engaged in a district professional team, takes her inquiry question and captivates her students through their personalized inquiries woven through every curricular area in her multi-age Grade 4-7 class. Students learn about the periodic table, the history of the world through time and much much more all through the lens of their own inquiries. The work of one of our district Professional Learning teams is captured in Collaborating to Engage All Learners. As one teacher describe the team – it’s a “gang of rebels” all committed to working together to improve teaching practice through the lens of inquiry and engaging all the learners in our classrooms.

There are lots of films in our growing video gallery all located on our SD10 website at — check out what’s happening where we in the Arrow and Slokan Lakes aim to live our tagline: World Class Learning in a Rural Environment.

## THE CHALLENGES OF LANGLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT KAREN REFUGEE STUDENTS

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by Christopher Sun

Writer

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Moving to Canada was supposed to be the start of a better and happier life for Buela, her parents and ten siblings, but two years after leaving a refugee camp for Langley, her ten year-old sister died after a bone-marrow transplant.

That sister had Thalassemia, a blood disorder that causes red blood cells to destruct, something three other siblings also have, including one born in Canada. When Buela's family arrived as Karen refugees from Myanmar (Burma) in 2008, they needed help navigating the medical system, finding a home that would fit them all comfortably and learning a new language and culture.

"One thing that really stood out is the variety of needs they have," explained Langley school board chair Robert McFarlane. "Simple things like having to get money from a bank, opening a bank account, paying bills, how to use a grocery store. Really basic stuff. Some Karen students entering our schools were born in refugee camps and lived there all their lives."

An insurgency stemming from 1949 displaced hundreds of thousands of Karens with more than 140,000 living in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. In 2006, the federal government started work on bringing almost 4,000 Karen refugees to Canada. Buela's family arrived in 2008 and they are among the almost 350 that settled in Langley.

“Most settled in the Douglas Park Elementary area so we were able to focus our efforts there,” McFarlane said about the support required such as a translators and counsellors. “The lady translating for us was a refugee. She came the year before.”

While the school district had support in place and available for the newly-arrived Karen students, their parents needed support too. When Buela and her family arrived, they received support through the Langley District Settlement Workers in Schools program and community organizations such as Immigrant Services Society.

“The school district focuses on the child and student but we cannot ignore the needs of the family,” McFarlane said. “The family needs to succeed so their children can succeed.”

As Buela got older, she became active in her school and community. She joined the badminton team, and various school groups such as social justice and an anti-bullying club. This led to giving workshops to Grade 6 students about bullying. She also got her first job, working at McDonalds. Now 19 and graduating in June, she and a younger sister have taken on more responsibilities in helping their family, such as translating for their parents and taking other siblings to medical appointments.

McFarlane said there was probably some typical schoolyard bullying and harassment of the Karen students when they arrived but such actions have become less tolerated over the years. Those students seem to be doing well now, almost 10 years after arriving. A few years ago, McFarlane spoke at a graduation ceremony when the first Karen student graduated, and they are continuing to graduate out of the school system. Buela’s post-secondary plan is to study business and accounting.

Langley school district has the experience to handle another influx of refugees, having gone through welcoming and integrating refugee students almost a decade ago, but McFarlane does not foresee that happening. Most of the 25,000 Syrian refugees the federal government are committed to bringing by the end of February are settling in Toronto and Montreal. Those that come to B.C. are settling in Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey.

“I’m aware of one family that has been sponsored privately, but I don’t know if they have school-aged children,” McFarlane said about Syrian refugees coming to Langley. “We’re not expecting a lot of refugees going directly to Langley but I know Langley may be where some ultimately end up because housing is less expensive here.”

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, as of January 21, 12,729 Syrian refugees have arrived into Canada.