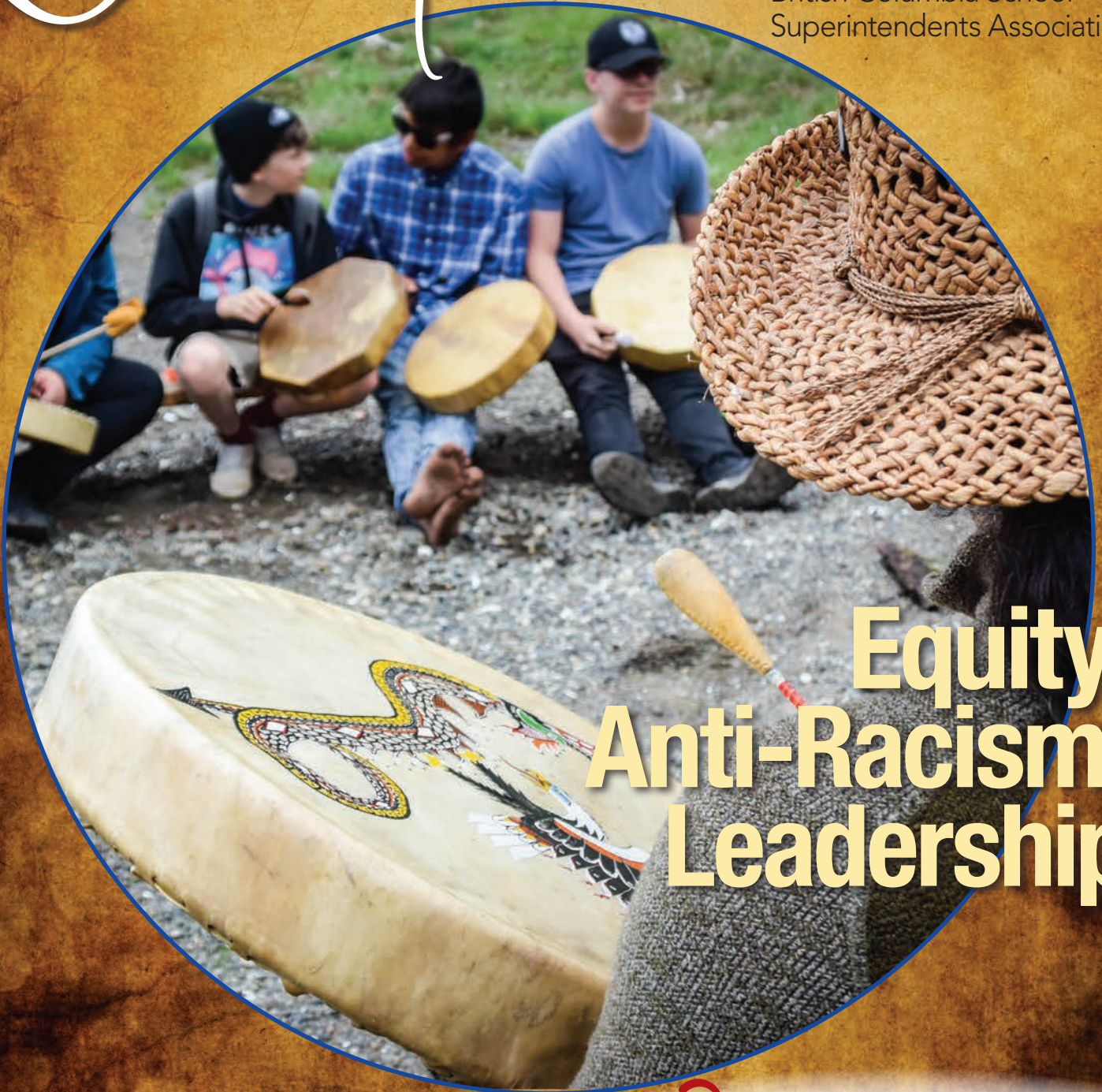


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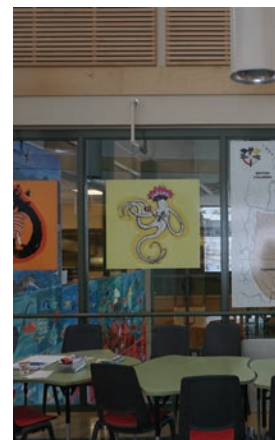
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Write for InspiRED

Do you have an inspiring story to share? If yes, we'd love to know more. Email Executive Director Claire Guy (cguy@bcssa.org) with a short abstract and author information, related to the theme *Reflect, Recover, Renew*. Note, article topics are subject to approval and we will be in touch if your abstract is chosen.

Fall 2021 Deadlines

June 21, 2021 - Abstracts to Claire Guy at BCSSA

By the end of June the line-up will be finalized and authors notified.

September 30 - Final articles due

Please reach out for more details!

On the cover:

During Hul'q'umi'num' Week, students from the Cowichan Valley School District participate in a drumming lesson on the beach at Xwaaqw'um (an area on Salt Spring Island) to ground their learning for the day. Learn more starting on page 10. Photo by: Mike Russell.



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A Message from the BCSSA President



Kevin Kaardal
President, British Columbia School
Superintendents Association

We can teach resilience
because hardships
will come... It is how
you respond that will
determine success in life.

It is my honour to be able to contribute my first President's Message to this edition of our BCSSA *InspirEd* magazine. I want to thank all of our colleagues who have contributed to this journal. In 2020, we experienced the tragedy of losing loved ones, separation from family and friends, loneliness, and some necessary restrictions on our freedoms during the pandemic. We have witnessed images across all forms of media of social injustice, racism, abuse of power, riots and outright tragedies that took the lives of too many.

It can seem overwhelming, but it can help to think about what we can do about it. I believe we can do a great deal. We exist in positions of privilege that allow us to influence the education of tomorrow's future leaders. We can model a purpose driven life and always ask what broader purpose our actions may serve. We can ensure our schools celebrate students' many heritages, support participation in our democracy, encourage student voices, and most importantly provide learning communities that are founded on the principles of equity and inclusion. We can use our knowledge and experiences to create space for our learners to lead with their hearts, acting with kindness, standing up for those who can't stand, speaking up for those who can't speak, and becoming a beacon of light for those whose lives have become dark.

We can teach resilience because hardships will come. We can foster the development of a growth mind-set so that momentary failure is just another lesson from which you can learn. It is how you respond that will determine success in life. We can set the structures and systems where students can risk, fail, learn, and relearn until they succeed.

Responding to the pandemic narrowed our focus on essential services, like mental health supports, using technology to reach out to families to check on their needs, and how we might better serve them. We deepened connections with community partners and services, as we did our best to help learners thrive under very different learning conditions.

As leaders of public schools, we can help create a society free from prejudice, focused on the inclusive gifts each person brings to their community so that all can flourish. We just need to understand our privilege and use it to help the system focus on teaching the competencies, attitudes, and habits of mind that will help each learner flourish as educated citizens in an interconnected global community.

The articles in this magazine shine a light on some of the work our colleagues are doing that will help our learners thrive. I am confident that this will lead to a better, more just, inclusive society free from racism and prejudice.

Kevin Kaardal

President, British Columbia School Superintendents Association
Superintendent, School District 23, Central Okanagan

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A Message from the Minister of Education



Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Education

We will move past the pandemic together and re-focus on our ongoing, systemwide commitments.

I strongly believe education is the cornerstone of a strong, equitable society. It nourishes our minds and our spirits, broadens our horizons, and serves as the foundation for a successful life.

It is an honour to write to you in my new role as Minister of Education. As a lifelong learner, it is a tremendous honour to be part of such a vibrant and important sector. I am excited to work with everyone across the education system to find innovative ways to build on our collective successes. Ultimately the strength of the sector is dependent on strong and respectful relationships with all partners, including students, families, teachers, support staff, principals and vice-principals, superintendents, Indigenous educators, trustees, and others.

I have spent the last 20 years advocating for our public health care system. In my most recent role as chief spokesperson for the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU), I represented more than 50,000 British Columbians who provide care and services in our health care system. It was a privilege to stand with them in addressing their concerns and challenges in

the health sector. And I will do the same in my new role – be an active listener who is a passionate advocate for students and staff in our Kindergarten to Grade 12 education system.

It has been nearly five months since I became Minister of Education, and in that time I've seen first-hand the leadership and teamwork that exemplifies and solidifies B.C.'s reputation as a world-class leader in education. Superintendents across our province have been innovative, creative, and adaptable to the changing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic and have continued to provide outstanding leadership and support to principals and vice-principals.

There have been many success stories shared by superintendents, principals, teachers, students, and parents on the Good News in Education website, and we know there are many, many more. For this, I thank BCSSA members for their tireless work to create adjustable plans that have allowed principals, vice-principals, teachers, and school staff to keep students safely learning in-class during these challenging times.

As the vaccine rollout is now underway, our goal for September is that all K to 12 students will fully return to school under Stage 1. We will move past the pandemic together and re-focus on our ongoing, systemwide commitments.

The mandate I recently received as Minister of Education builds on our government's commitment to put people first, protecting and enhancing the public services they rely on.

The importance of anti-racism is addressed prominently in every Minister's mandate letter and highlights this government's commitment to build a truly inclusive province. As Minister of Education, my commitment to anti-racism is at the forefront of our collective work in schools. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are values which must be fully integrated into the

fabric of our education system.

The Ministry of Education hosted a Community Roundtable on Anti-Racism in July 2020 to support the development of a K to 12 Anti-Racism Action Plan, which continues to be developed and is expected to be released later this year. We will continue to listen and work collaboratively with our partners to ensure we can effectively strengthen the curriculum, further support diversity, equity, and inclusion, and make meaningful contributions to the global effort to end systemic racism.

Further, now more than ever, we need to prioritize the mental health and wellbeing of our children and staff. Our experience through the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of having strong mental health supports in our K to 12 sector. We know there will be many young people who have experienced stress, anxiety, and uncertainty in their lives because of this pandemic.

I'm working with my colleague Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, to get dedicated child and youth mental health teams up and running as soon as possible, so school districts have more resources available. The dedicated teams will build on our new Mental Health in Schools (MHIS) Strategy, which embeds mental health and substance use programs and services for students throughout the education system, and expands on A Pathway to Hope, our government-wide strategy to transform mental health and substance use care for children and young people.

All of this work requires collaboration, and as the pandemic has taught us, we are stronger together. Thank you for continuing to lead with compassion and courage during this challenging time.

Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Education

A Message from the BCSSA Executive Director



Claire Guy
Executive Director
British Columbia School
Superintendents Association

Leading learning during these unprecedented times requires a skillset of compassion, innovation, and inquiry to be able to set culturally responsive conditions for student learning.

As I reflect upon the past year, and the articles in this edition, I marvel how we have collectively adapted to our new reality of leading through the COVID-19 pandemic. This year has seen us engage as an educational community of practice in ways we could never have imagined. It is a testament to the spirit and resilience of our system leaders that while we continue to navigate inclusive and equitable ways to support student learning and well-being, we continue to see the tremendous engagement of our sector in capacity building and professional growth.

Each time I put out a request for journal articles, committee representation, survey feedback, meeting invitations, mentor support, resources, or professional learning opportunities, I am impressed by the dedication and participation of our educational leaders as they engage and make time for their own professional growth, and the growth of the colleagues and students they serve. It is remarkable that with the volume and level of challenge each day brings, we continue to seek opportunities to further develop our skills, knowledge, and relationships with the common goal of strengthening student success.

I am particularly proud of the engagement of our BCSSA membership as we continue to clarify and articulate our vision, mission, and core values to guide our association's work. We are exploring the leadership competencies necessary for success by refreshing our Dimensions of Practice standards to align them with current practice, context, and need. Leading learning during these unprecedented times requires a skillset of compassion, innovation, and inquiry to be able to set culturally responsive conditions for student learning. Focusing on Truth and Reconciliation, equity, anti-racism, diversity, inclusion, social-emotional learning, and well-being are now at the centre of what we do as leaders and how we move learning forward.

It would have been understandable and an "easy out" for us to use the pandemic as an excuse to slow the transformation agenda, or to press "pause" on moving our professional growth

forward. Instead, have accepted the challenge as an opportunity and a catalyst for positive change. While we could have originally thought about the pandemic from a deficit perspective, we are taking a strengths-based approach to maximize what we can achieve and improve. This magazine's articles and highlighted district examples confirm that our work to support and lead student learning remains at the heart of what we do and will continue to be our guiding star.

It is with humility and gratitude that I thank all the sponsors and contributors to this journal and to our entire BCSSA for their commitment to our collective responsibility to students. The name *InspirED* is a fitting title!

Claire Guy
Executive Director
British Columbia School Superintendents Association

BCSSA RETIREES

As our *InspirED* journal is only published twice a year, it is important to recognize our colleagues who have either recently retired or will be retiring in the coming months. We thank them for their years of service to students and communities in our province and wish them well in their new journeys. They will be sorely missed and our BCSSA is richer for having worked with them. Please join us in congratulating the retirements of these esteemed colleagues:

SD10 – Terry Taylor, Superintendent & Secretary Treasurer
SD20 – Bill Ford, Superintendent
SD22 – Katherine Wickum, District Principal
SD22 – Joe Rogers, Superintendent
SD23 – Rick Oliver, Assistant Superintendent
SD28 – Susan MacDonald, Director of Instruction, Curriculum
SD36 – Gordon Powell, District Principal, Aboriginal Learning
SD39 – Adrian Keough, Director of Instruction, Learning Services
SD39 – Mette Hamaguchi, Director of Instruction, Learning Services
SD42 – Sylvia Russell, Superintendent
SD44 – Joanne Robertson, Director of Instruction
SD46 – Patrick Bocking, Superintendent
SD64 – Doug Livingstone, Director of Instruction, Learning Services
Yukon – David Wipf, Superintendent

Truth Before Reconciliation

By Mike Russell, Cowichan Valley School District



COWICHAN VALLEY

School District

The new Cowichan School District Logo.

The Cowichan Valley School District has set out an ambitious plan to create meaningful change for our Indigenous learners, Indigenous staff, and our communities. These detailed plans have manifested in many ways, but all find their genesis at the same source: the Cowichan Valley School District's new strategic plan, Beyond Education.

The Board developed the new strategic plan through the most comprehensive community engagement initiatives that they've ever undertaken. Through this reflective journey of data analysis, community gatherings, aspirational engagement questions, and a purposeful focus on equity, this plan coalesced into a powerful guiding document. One of the four priorities of Beyond Education is the focus on Indigenous Ways of Knowing. This priority guides our reconciliation work and helps map out our discovery of the truth as we continue our reconciliation journey.

The Hul'q'umi'num' phrase nuts'a' maat shqwaluwun kw tst yaayus, "working together with one heart, one mind, one thought," encompasses how we view our work ahead. It is a collective journey, and we need to ensure our entire district has the ability and knowledge to participate fully. It is also important to recognize who that work belongs to. Reconciliation is the work of the settler, not the Indigenous communities on whose lands we live. The fundamental question of that work, in the context of a school system, is how does a district dismantle colonial systems in order to ensure the success of all learners? We put truth before reconciliation.

The truth

The history of the school system in Canada has a very different meaning for those in Indigenous communities. The function of schools, even up to the 1990s, was to dismantle and erase Indigenous culture through the Residential School System. Not only did this happen as recently as this generation, but the inter-generational trauma inflicted on Indigenous peoples over the course of the functioning Residential School System still plays a primary role in the difficulties that they have to work to overcome today. Layer this trauma on top of the prevalent racism

that Indigenous communities and individuals have to deal with, and we realize how important our work towards reconciliation is.

The journey

It is now our job to learn about our collective past and use it as a springboard towards a more respectful future. In the Cowichan Valley School District, this means, "embracing Indigenous perspectives and knowledge as part of our history and recognizing Indigenous content as integral to our learning." To do that, we must first shine a light on those structural inequalities and, "critically examine our own biases, attitudes, beliefs, values, and practices to facilitate truth and reconciliation." We've developed concrete programs that help us do exactly that.

When looking specifically to "address the inequalities for our Indigenous learners" we always centre our work around them. Last year, we embarked on an appreciative inquiry project titled Yu'ewen Skweyulus. Our researcher, Hannah Morales, interviewed Indigenous students in the district to find out what brings them to school and what the district can do to enhance supports. This comprehensive data showed a myriad of ways in which we could enhance support for our learners and reaffirmed the idea that both student voice and representation matter.

"The Aboriginal Studies are a little vague. You learn from a historical account and don't learn about who we are today. Our culture is still here." — Grade 6 Student, Yu'ewen Skweyulus research project.

These salient words from a Grade 6 student are vital to remember and act upon if we want to see success as an educational institution. Indigenous culture continues to thrive thanks to generations of knowledge keepers and Elders who resisted all attempts to destroy their culture. Indigenous culture thrives and is alive in our schools and community.

Our largest and most overt public commitment to the acknowledgement of our strong bonds with our thriving Indigenous





Staff Pro-D canoe trip. Photos courtesy of Mike Russell.

communities can be found in our new logo. The logo creation and the strategic plan development are inextricably linked, and we put our words into action with the development of the new logo.

When the Board decided on a new logo, there was no question that we would ask an Indigenous artist to lead the project. The careful steps we had taken on our reconciliation journey continued with the Board enlisting the services of respected local artist Stuart Pagaduan to lead the process and creation of the new logo. Stuart is a councillor and Cowichan Tribes member, and a Hul'q'umi'num' Language and Culture Teacher in the district. Stuart's art adorns schools, classes, and even people throughout the district. Not only did Stuart bring the strength of his art and his teachings, in his own words, the logo, "is a bridge between the Indigenous community and the Duncan community." His art acts as a catalyst to bridge those worlds.

The new logo features the warm colours of the rising sun, which represent the new day, and a time to give thanks to all we have. Inside the sun are the spaal' (raven) and wuxus (frog) who both represent transformation. Our collective journey is represented in the canoe and four paddlers. The canoe is a central part of Coast Salish culture and here it denotes our community coming together on the same journey.

Stuart is quick to point out that this artwork represents reflection and hope. In his video introducing the new logo, and specifically referring to the image of the canoe and paddlers, Stuart asks us the questions, "Why are we here? What are we doing? Which way are we going? Do we even have our paddles in the water? Are we even on the same canoe?" and goes on to state, "history has proven that we have not been on the same canoe, we are not working together. . . This is an opportunity that we can all get on the canoe together, we can all paddle at the same time."

There is still much work to be done, but Stuart's provocations turn our attention to the system as a whole and how we can ensure our next moves are intentional, deliberate, and based on the fundamental principal of equity. By putting truth before reconciliation, we can ensure that we are indeed in the same canoe, paddling the same way. 🌈

Mike Russell is the Director of Communications for the Cowichan Valley School District. A storyteller in the land of Storytellers, Mike is honoured to work in the traditional territories of the Quw'utsun, Malahat, Ts'uubaa-asatx, Halalt, Penelakut, Stz'uminus, and Lyackson Peoples and is committed to telling the stories of the our xe'xe' smun'eem, the sacred children, that recognize the truth and are based in honour and respect.

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Learning to See with Two Eyes

By Steve Labrie, Central Okanagan Public Schools

I am a child of the 80s. I grew up on the West Coast where I enjoyed the privileges of a middle-class upbringing in an ethnically diverse environment, learning the importance of **equality** in the “patchwork quilt” that was the prevailing metaphor for Canadian society at the time. We, as Canadians, were to treat everyone **the same** — distinguishing ourselves from the other societies of inequality around the world that made the news we watched after our family dinner.

As children, it was commonly taught to us to “try to see from the other person’s perspective” in an effort to bridge gaps in understanding and achieve acceptance — in essence, to “walk a mile in their shoes,” see value, and keep the different squares of our “patchwork quilt” from fraying as we preserved our individual cultural identities within the Canadian whole. My early understanding was that if I tried to see the world from my perspective, I was not able to empathize with or truly understand the experiences of others.

By seeing from someone else’s, I could better develop my ability to treat everyone **the same**, and accept them as Canadians like me, regardless of their differences in things like ethnicity, orientation, or world view. It was either my perspective, or their perspective, one “eye,” or the “other.” In retrospect, I realize it limited me, these whitewashed differences; I was viewing them as things to discard rather than celebrate. It opened my eyes to equality, but partially blinded me to equity. As an adult in 2020, seeing with two eyes at the same time makes for a clearer, more holistic picture.

So, how to accomplish this change in perspective? “Two Eyed Seeing” comes out of Cape Breton, the work of Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall, and has been characterized as the ability “To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together.”¹ It is arguably a more holistic way to see our world, with the strengths of both lenses providing more clarity and added richness of experience through an appreciative focus. At our school, it is one of the pathways that we have taken to achieve a more intentionally equitable school culture.

This year, for a variety of reasons, our staff is moving ahead with a theme of “equity” — one of our aspirations is to have our staff and students develop the ability to “see with both eyes” and experience all the benefits and richness that diversity brings to us. Part of the impetus for this was born from a desire to move forward with the Indigenization of our curriculum, both for and with our students; partly out of our community’s need to come to grips with what had been happening in the world and our own community regarding ethnicity, race, and intolerance; and also, partly from the deepening breadth of student learning needs made very evident during spring’s COVID-19 pandemic education experience.

Concurrently, this is also the first year of our new district “Equity in Action Agreement,” an initiative that seeks to implement plans that push our work around equity further, responding to needs specific to our region while recognizing the wisdom in the “Calls to Action” of the Truth

and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This confluence produced the “why” in what is becoming a very exciting path forward for us; the weaving of equity into our school fabric, so every school community member can see themselves represented here and receive the support needed to learn and live on an “even playing field.” While the broader application of equity is our goal, much of our focus thus far has been on Indigenization as a starting point for our work.

Our staff started their work with the theme of equity in September, beginning with the creation of an Equity Committee comprised of volunteer members of our teaching and administrative staff, with some parent representatives added in. The committee’s mandate was to explore different aspects of equity at our school, evaluating where we are in order to determine where we want to be. Given the task, the committee decided to divide into three areas of focus: examining how diversity is represented at our school; developing an “equity” lens or filter to use as a decision-making tool; and scanning, a group tasked with determining student and school community attitudes towards and beliefs about equity and its application here.

Once our committee was up and running, we focused on Implementation Day – a day designed to further our theme. Together with support from our Indigenous Education Department, we planned a day designed to immerse our staff in Indigenization. We began the day armed with flipbooks detailing the Indigenous knowledge of the local plants in our region, then embarked on a walk-through of our local hiking area, learning to identify and “see” our native plants differently.

From there it was back to our school for a discussion of “Two Eyed Seeing” and immersion into the story of “The Four Food Chiefs,” a key local teaching from our Okanagan Peoples central to their understanding of how to live and interact with the earth and all living things. After a lunch catered by our local Indigenous bakery and restaurant, we undertook a “Metissage” process, a word coming from the Latin term for “weaving a cloth from different fibers.”² This process, which involved a group reading of many different types of texts to unearth understandings on a common topic, had us examine various perspectives of both Western and Indigenous origin of science.

Our day ended with our staff working together to “jump off” on developing units, some designed to explore a topic through both Indigenous and Western perspectives, and some to establish intentional transparency with the students around the First Peoples Principles of Learning – teaching the students the language of those principles and having students apply them to their learning. We have established a staff repository of these ideas and strategies that we hope to continue to contribute to.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still affecting us all, we have continued to proceed in this area at the pace of our staff. We have made some progress with our site representation, adding artifacts around the building displaying our local Nsyilxcen language, and artistic representations of the central story of “The Four Food Chiefs” referenced

earlier. We have created a “hall of flags” with flags ranging from our province and country to that of our Okanagan Nation Alliance, and with the Rainbow flag to reflect our community’s diversity of orientation. Our Equity Committee is hard at work on their selected endeavours, with questions for scanning going through the vetting process, an equity filter coming to draft, and plans for a community project around the creation of a rainbow crosswalk. We are looking forward to an upcoming in-service opportunity for our staff on *how* to appropriately and authentically *tell* Indigenous stories in our classrooms, with a secondary focus on *how to prepare* the listeners to those stories to effectively receive and understand the many different layers of knowledge embedded within.

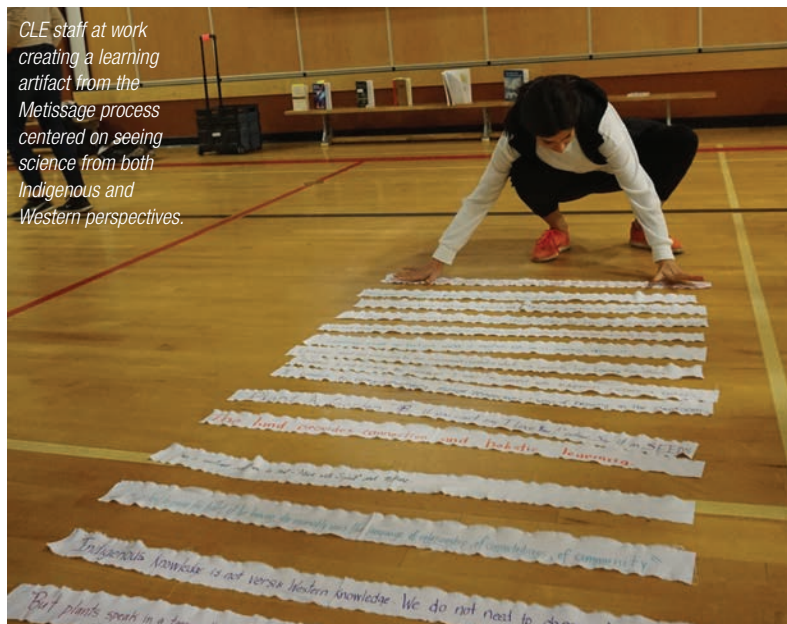
We are excited about our learning, and about how we are growing to better reflect our land, community and all of its peoples and their origins. As our more “equitable” perspective broadens and we grow in understanding, we can better see the strengths of the diverse cultures, people, and experiences around us. To close one eye again would dim the world around us; from here on, we will see with two. 🌈

Steve Labrie is the Vice-Principal of Chute Lake Elementary School in the Central Okanagan Public Schools. He lives, works and plays on the unceded Traditional Territory of the Okanagan Syilx people in the Okanagan Valley.

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CLE staff at work creating a learning artifact from the Metissage process centered on seeing science from both Indigenous and Western perspectives.



Schools and the “new normal”.

The COVID-19 situation is evolving and our response is continually changing, as lockdowns and restrictions are put in place and lifted. It is important to be familiar with the latest developments and ensure that cleaning and disinfection protocols stay up-to-date.

Conventional cleaning and disinfection generally involves manually applying cleaning and disinfection solutions and wiping with cloths.¹ This method has variable effectiveness, and spray-and-wipe cleaning and disinfection procedures in healthcare settings frequently do not achieve consistent desired results.²

We can do better.

The electrostatic application of disinfectants is a newer technology which, when used together with conventional cleaning, can significantly boost levels of disinfection.³

The electrostatic sprayer sends a negatively charged cloud of disinfectant that envelopes sprayed objects. The charged particles are attracted to surfaces, leading to more uniform disinfectant coverage. The electrostatic dispersed disinfectant spray can also reach hard-to-reach locations where pathogens may be beyond the reach of manual spray bottle and wiping procedures.³

Practical use of new disinfection technology.

A Canadian study, published in the Canadian Journal of Infection Control, conducted in several schools ranging from Kindergarten to High school, assessed the effectiveness of conventional cleaning and disinfection compared with the addition of electrostatic spray disinfection technology (Clorox Total T360*) to conventional cleaning and disinfection on the general hygiene state of student desks.⁴

The results demonstrated an additive effect in significantly reducing pathogen colonies on the student desks (N=36)⁴:

- Mean pretest colony-forming units (CFUs) per desk were 126.8.
- Following conventional cleaning and disinfection, mean CFUs decreased to 73.4 (P = 0.0003), representing a significant 42% reduction in mean CFUs.
- Use of subsequent electrostatic disinfectant spraying after conventional cleaning and disinfection further reduced mean CFUs to 54.2 (P = 0.02), representing a significant 57% reduction in mean CFUs.

The independent effect of electrostatic disinfectant spraying without an intervening conventional cleaning step was also tested on 64 desks. Mean pretest CFUs were 106.4 and after electrostatic disinfectant spraying mean CFUs decreased to 62.9 (P = 0.001), representing a 41% significant reduction in mean CFUs.

Conventional cleaning and disinfection procedures were effective in reducing viable microbes on student desktops. However, there was a significant additive disinfection effect when electrostatic spray disinfection followed conventional cleaning and disinfection.

Schools – Plan to prevent.

Clorox* is your partner in disinfection. As makers of disinfectants that are approved for use against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, we can play an important role in educating and working with school authorities to assist with setting up and maintaining cleaning and disinfection protocols that are in line with public health guidelines.

Invest to prevent.

It may be prudent to invest in proper cleaning and disinfection procedures and equipment, such as electrostatic spray disinfection technology. The cost of prevention may be lower than the cost of treatment.

When disinfecting solution is applied using the Clorox Total 360* system, the front, back and sides of surfaces are completely covered – much more effectively than traditional cleaning methods.

Clorox Total 360* is a one-step treatment when used as directed, so cleaning and disinfecting takes less time and less cleaning product is needed. It requires no Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and has no re-entry time after spraying.

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Learn more at [CloroxPro.ca](https://www.cloroxpro.ca)



¹ Rhinovirus

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Inclusive Education for Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing



A Language Acquisition Support Worker teaching a student ASL.

By Dr. Michelle Schmidt, School District No. 36 (Surrey)

Surrey School District serves a diverse community of learners, including a large population of deaf and hard of hearing (d/hh) students. We believe in equitable access to language and learning and are proud to offer d/hh students a range of educational options and supports. Our goal is to provide accessible language to every child, which includes American Sign Language (ASL) and English (spoken and print), as well as auditory and visual supports. Grounded in principles of inclusion and guided by evidence-based practice, we observe and follow the child's lead as they choose the language modality/modalities that work for them,¹ and are aware that preferences may change over time.

ASL is the only language that is 100 per cent accessible to d/hh children from birth,² yet more than 90 per cent of d/hh children are born to hearing parents who do not know ASL. With today's technology and intensive early intervention support, many d/hh children are able to meaningfully access spoken language, but we know that this is not the case for all d/hh children.

The school environment is fast-paced, with multiple interactions throughout the day, making it difficult for children with incomplete language acquisition to keep pace with their peers. D/hh children who never attain meaningful access to spoken language are continuously missing parts of language, which has a cumulative effect that can permanently affect language and brain development, and future learning.^{3,4} In response, Surrey Schools has developed a number of initiatives, including efforts to ensure d/hh students have opportunities to learn and use ASL.

Kindergarten transition support

For some families with d/hh children, the move from early intervention into the school system can be daunting. To provide increased support to all incoming families, we have a Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TDHH) and a Parent Liaison specializing in kindergarten transition support. These individuals are the families' key contacts and ongoing guides as parents explore educational options and make informed decisions regarding their child's educational journey.



Language Acquisition Support Worker session with Grade 1 students.

These individuals work closely with the other members of the TDHH team, early intervention agencies, and other community partners, which paves the way for a smooth transition to kindergarten.

Neighbourhood schools

For many parents, having their d/hh child(ren) attend their neighbourhood catchment school is preferred. They may have older children attending the school, want to be within walking distance, or have other strong ties to their home community. D/hh students attending their neighbourhood school are case managed and supported by a TDHH. Additional support may also be provided by an Educational Visual Language Interpreter (EVL), a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP), a Language Acquisition Support Worker (LASW), an Educational Assistant (EA), an Occupational Therapist, etc.

Cohort schools

Some families prefer that their d/hh child(ren) attend a school where there is an existing community of d/hh peers and a greater general awareness of language and accessibility

considerations. To that end, we have created several cohort schools for d/hh students. In addition to the support received from a TDHH, cohort schools provide d/hh students opportunities to interact with their d/hh peers, learn from Deaf role models, and use ASL within their school community.

These opportunities are critical for language acquisition, and the development of



Photos courtesy of Dr. Michelle Schmidt.

cultural knowledge and self-identity.⁵ Cohort schools are akin to the “hubs” that Anglin-Jaffe (2020)⁶ has called for to replace social spaces lost as a result of the closure of specialized schools.

ASL-English Bilingual primary classroom

This school year, we created a bilingual primary classroom. The classroom teacher, a Child of Deaf Adults (CODA), is a native ASL user able to seamlessly move between ASL and English. An EVLI is also present to ensure language access as students interact with students and staff throughout the school. The small class size allows for more individualized instruction and enhanced language acquisition opportunities tailored to each student’s unique needs.

D/hh children in the bilingual primary classroom come together several times throughout the week with another primary class for shared activities, supporting the development of important communication and social skills with typically hearing peers. This sister class, bilingual primary class, and Grade 5 Buddies are all being taught ASL, further

strengthening the bonds between deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing students in the school.

In the future, it is our hope to extend ASL instruction to all students at the school. Two Deaf EAs, also native ASL users, currently work in the bilingual primary classroom, and students also have access to an SLP, an LASW, and other support staff as necessary. By immersing d/hh children in language in this fully accessible classroom environment, we are seeing them thrive.

Language Acquisition Support Workers

Our team of LASWs are all Deaf adults and native ASL users who are passionate about language and literacy for children and offer a range of services to support language development. Working directly with students, staff, and parents, the LASWs infuse ASL into schools by offering individual and group instruction, including lunch-and-learn classes for staff, and assisting in the creation of ASL clubs. They strengthen the d/hh student community by providing staff and peers with strategies to enhance communication and opportunities to learn first-hand about the language and culture of the Deaf community from Deaf role models.

Teacher and student resources

We partner with external Registered ASL-English Interpreters who provide EVLI in-service and support, and created an Educational Visual Language Interpreters Guidebook. We have also created the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Resource Guide for Classroom Teachers and Language Acquisition and Educational Access for Children and Youth who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing; A Range of Educational Options. When the pandemic hit and classes were suspended, we partnered with Sign Referral Services Inc. and the Family Network for Deaf Children to provide counselling and ASL story time, etc.

Future goals

Moving forward, we hope to expand ASL offerings and establish additional cohorts. We

continued on page 18

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would also like to offer bilingual preschool/childcare, stressing the importance of early intervention and high expectations for d/hh children.

How did we get here?

We worked closely with community partners and listened to Deaf and hard of hearing adults and learned from their lived experience. We shared what we were seeing in our schools and explored options. While we continue to provide full support to d/hh children using spoken language, we also need to infuse ASL into schools – and to teach ASL to children's peers, parents, family members, and staff. D/hh children need opportunities to interact with d/hh peers as well as Deaf role models.⁷

There is no evidence that learning ASL will hinder a child's spoken language development,³ in fact research proves that for d/hh individuals, bilingualism acts as a protective measure to minimize health risks, including Language Deprivation Syndrome.⁸ We need to continually assess student progress,⁹ as well as language input (and the child's access to it) so as to set goals and develop strategies,¹⁰ and ensure that parents are informed regarding their child's current language development and future trajectory.

D/hh children who do not have full access to an accessible language are not in an inclusive setting. If we are to be truly inclusive and to incorporate basic values that promote participation, friendship, and interaction, children must have a shared language. Teachers must have high expectations for their d/hh students and do everything possible to ensure they are able to achieve their full potential.

We cannot do this work alone – nor should we. For decades, well-intentioned hearing people – including me – have been determining what they believe is best for d/hh children with little to no input from Deaf adults. The Deaf community has a wealth of knowledge and experience to share with us and it's time we listened. 

Dr. Michelle Schmidt is the Director of Instruction, Student Support, for the Surrey School District.

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A District's Journey in (In)Equity and Inclusion

By Jann Schmidt and Gail Higginbottom, School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake)

Every day, there is an endless to-do-list so what we focus our finite time on needs to be purposefully chosen. At School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake), we have learned through the work of *The Deeper Learning Dozen*, in partnership with Harvard University, a theory to guide change. As part of this learning journey, there are three aspects to the theory of change: “(in)equity is structural; adult learning and student learning are symmetrical; and leadership accelerates emergence.”¹ We recognize that, “we must become the systems we need,”² caring, thoughtful, collaborative, reflective, and adaptive.

According to the work of Adrienne Maree Brown, “Emergent strategy is how we intentionally change in ways that grow our capacity to embody the just and liberated worlds we long for.”² As a district, we have been asking about the world we want to stand in, speak in, teach in, and most importantly, be in. Canada has committed to the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), including Section 7 under Education: “We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and

employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.”³

We have work to do. Great journeys, like deep learning, are not instantaneous nor free of pain or loss. It is through travelling together that we make meaning.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines equity as, “ensuring that education outcomes are the result of students’ abilities, will and effort, and not the result of their personal circumstances.”⁴ Our district has begun the conscious work of examining our systems, beliefs, and understandings as we continue to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for a transformational change in diversity, equity, and inclusion. This is just the beginning of a story about uncovering what we have been unconsciously not seeing, observing, and thereby supporting.

We are in the third-year iteration of our district’s Indigenous Equity Scan. Senator Murray Sinclair shared that there are four questions every Indigenous person must answer:

1. Where do I come from?
2. Where am I going?
3. What is my purpose?
4. Who am I?⁵

We believe that students graduating from high school in British Columbia should be

able to answer these important questions. In order to facilitate this, in the first year of the Equity Scan, a small team came together to develop a tool kit with the goal of developing common language and awareness of inequity here in our district. The tool kit was shared district-wide with trustees, students, administration, teachers, and support staff. The tool kit emphasized personal reflection, personal understanding, and a definition of equity.

In the second year, through a district survey, we continued to build on common language and expose gaps, thus collecting valuable data of voice and experience. In addition, we individualized student tracking for graduation plans and individualized student support for on-reserve students during the pandemic. We also grew our efforts to amplify student and community voice through district and school events. We have not reached 100 per cent success in graduation rates, yet our district continues to climb upwards and we continue to create stronger relationships as our foundation to this important work.

To launch professional development this year, we welcomed Ivan Coyote as a keynote speaker at our district learning series. Through the art of storytelling, they shared their connection to a grandmother



International students who studied in School District No. 8-Kootenay Lake (picture taken pre-pandemic). Photo courtesy of Madeleine Guenette.

whose unconditional love strengthened an inner sense of identity. This powerful relationship grew at a time when the world was often cruel, closed-minded, and unaccepting to individuals who did not fit gendered-cookie-cutter-roles. The lesson shared by Coyote shifted our district's practice in email signatures to recognize gendered pronouns. This shift in communication is necessary and timely.

The commitment to equitable work is designed alongside district anti-racism

work. For example, on October 23, 2020, Provincial Professional Development Day, SD8 Kootenay Lake, in partnership with Selkirk College and the Mir Centre for Peace, organized a day of workshops focusing on Anti-racism and Intercultural Awareness. What was unique about this was the conscious core belief of removing barriers in order to foster full participation. Planning committee discussions centered on providing a platform for participants to learn from authentic stories of impact

and experience, thus promoting a deeper understanding of anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Questions that guided the planning of this day included:

1. *How do we ensure that the voices that need to be heard are the voices that are speaking?* By continuing to enlist the help of our local Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) community members who shared experiences, facilitated focused discussions, and created cultural activities.
2. *How do we get as many people to hear as possible?* By removing the need for membership to participate in this day.

We sent out the notice about the Anti-racism and Cultural Awareness event across organizations and encouraged an open sharing of the invite. The Field-of-Dreams visioning saw 586 registrants, including community organizations, staff, and families. From B.C. and into Alberta, six school districts, several municipalities, and many more organizations, groups, and individuals listened and learned together on this day.

The tragic death of George Floyd this past summer heightened awareness of racism in systems and structures, including education. We realized that in designing this event we needed to invite the margins in and amplify those voices. We needed to create space for truth. Desmond Cole, author of the book *The Skin We're In*, is a Canadian author, dynamic speaker, and an activist working to illuminate the issues of systemic racism. He is a voice who debunks the myth that racism is not a Canadian problem. He shared thematic stories to illustrate representative power, the role of the media, and police violence within Canada. Cole also emphasized that to confirm Canada is not racially neutral – look at Canada's history of colonization.

We are hugely grateful to both Desmond and the members of our community for their willingness to share their truth. Part of leadership is to open

A promotional poster for 'Pirate Adventures'. The top half features a stylized pirate ship logo on the left and the title 'Pirate Adventures' in large, bold, red letters. Below the title, the contact information 'Call: 604-754-7535' and 'Book: www.pirateadventures.ca' is displayed. The main text reads: 'Join our Pirates on board a real PIRATE SHIP! From the sea battle, a treasure hunt, sword fighting - to walking the plank, you will be amazed as our energetic crew taps into your child's imagination transforming him or her into a pirate (with face painting & pirate gear)'. Below this, it says: 'This 75-minute interactive action-filled pirate cruise is a wonderful opportunity to be introduced to Vancouver's exciting False Creek waterway.' A red banner at the bottom of the text area says: 'At Pirate Adventures, learning is always fun!'. The bottom half of the poster shows a photograph of a man in a pirate costume (white shirt, black vest, black hat) holding the hand of a young girl in a pink dress, both smiling. In the background, a large pirate ship is visible on the water at sunset.

safe spaces of shared learning where communities are learning together.

Our closing speaker was Dr. Christopher Horsethief, Ktunaxa scholar and leader, who ended this day challenging participants to commit to their own next steps in reconciliation. It was a powerful day: Elder, Indigenous, international student, and BIPOC voices shared heartfelt experiences and insightful messages resulting in impactful learning and reflection for all participants. Everyone left a little more aware of racism in the Kootenays both inside and outside our learning institutions.

Our ongoing next steps have entailed a database of resources, local individuals, societies, and online media that is posted on our SD8 Kootenay Lake website. We gratefully share this website with acknowledgement to all those who have contributed to its content.

We acknowledge that we have a lot more work to do and systemic racism will not go away without committing to critically examining our systems and structures. As shared by Robin Wall Kimmerer, "We are told that stories are living beings, they grow, they develop, they remember."⁶ The story of racism is more than acts by individuals, it is the beliefs inherited in contemporary systems. We have a shared responsibility to value and celebrate all individuals and all cultures, and to lead this cultural change. In leading this work, we will be stronger and closer to changing this dark story and accelerating emergence.

Visit <https://antiracism.sd8.bc.ca> for further information on SD8 Kootenay Lake's work on anti-racism. 🌈

This article was written by Jann Schmidt, District Principal of International Education, and Gail Higginbottom, District Principal of Aboriginal Education. They would like to send huge thanks to Naomi Ross, District Principal of Innovative Learning, School District 8 Kootenay Lake, for her assistance editing.

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Coaching for Equity: A Collaborative Book Study

By Selma Smith, Lyn Daniels, and Gloria Sarmiento, School District No. 36 (Surrey)

Inspired serendipity! This phrase aptly describes how the three of us decided to lead a collaborative book study with members of our departments. Meeting by chance and discussing topics that matter most to us formed the foundation of the multi-department study of Elena Aguilar's latest book, *Coaching for Equity: Conversations that Change Practice* (Jossey-Bass, 2020),¹ and the subsequent website www.brightmorningteam.com. We knew that a study of this book would challenge our own practice and encourage the same in others.

Initially, we established several purposes and intentions for our research. As three district-based leaders, we wanted to explore equity and coaching, and to provide a place to talk about race, power, and systems of oppression. The structure and organization used by Aguilar in *Coaching for Equity* lends itself to a collaborative book study. There is an interlude at the end of each chapter that poses questions for reflection, provides quotations for inspiration, and returns to the five principles of transformational coaching named by the author: compassion, curiosity, connection, courage, and purpose, which we found helpful.

Coaching and mentoring are important educational practices in our district. We have a collaborative teacher mentorship program and we provide coaching and training in a variety of settings for teachers, principals, vice principals, and other interested staff. We use other publications by this author, including *The Art of Coaching* (2013),² *The Art of Coaching Teams* (2016),³ and *Onward* (2018)⁴ in district workshops. Accordingly, our district's definition of mentorship and coaching was drafted following consultations with Aguilar and other authors and leaders in this area.

The subtitle of Aguilar's book, "Conversations that Change Practice" inspired a framework for shaping how the book study sessions were facilitated. We are interested in whether the book study will influence the way we have conversations about race and equity. Being able to reflect on where one is, and where one wants to be, requires each of us to come together and not only hear each other but listen with our hearts and minds.

We know that if we continue to engage in conversations like this, we can interrupt beliefs that limit the life chances of our students. Changing



Some of the group members in conversation. Photo courtesy of Gloria Sarmiento.

beliefs is one of the key features of Aguilar's definition of educational equity where "there is no predictability of success or failure that correlates with any social or cultural factor — a child's educational experiences or outcomes are not predictable because of the race, ethnicity, linguistic background, economic class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical and cognitive ability, or any other socio-political marker [and that] beyond the predictability of success and failure, educational equity means that every child is seen for who they truly are and their unique interests and gifts are surfaced and cultivated."¹

Not surprisingly, this book study raised difficult emotions in our participants, who then shared stories of past hurts and healing. We were unsure how many of our colleagues would be interested in learning together through a book study, especially when it was going to be entirely online. Those who signed up expressed a variety of reasons as to why they were registering:

- I appreciate the opportunity to have a focused examination of my own thinking and understandings of equity and inclusion, especially as it relates to my practice and collaborating with classroom teachers.
- I would like to deepen my understanding of systemic racism, reflect on my own practice, and lead or facilitate change.
- To create safer spaces and opportunities for students to explore their own identity... and, to build a more equitable and inclusive society, this needs to exist in our classrooms. I want to be better equipped to create these opportunities.

We knew that including staff from all three departments would help bring people with diverse roles together. Recognizing that our book study was going to be completely virtual and would touch on sensitive topics, we needed to create safe spaces for dialogue. We developed home groups for breakout discussions that we have used in every session. Facilitation groups were set up to foster shared responsibility for each other's

learning. Each participant signed up to facilitate the learning of two chapters with a partner or partners.

The three of us planned and led the opening session, wherein we worked to set a tone of listening, caring, and learning. This included time for each home group to get to know each other and to develop their own norms or community agreements for discussions. We knew that if we held space where all voices and experiences were honoured, we would engage in powerful learning together.

In holding space and including structures that

ensure equity of participation while making sure we were not attached to any outcome, allowed the experience to unfold for all of us. Informed by the work of Malcom Knowles and other scholars, we centered our planning on three principles of adult learning:

- Adult learners must feel safe to learn;
- Adults come to learning experiences with histories; and
- Adults want agency in their learning.

We believe agency was exercised by involving all participants in the creation of the learning experiences, by creating safety within the home groups, and, as leaders, we showed up as learners ourselves in every session.

Each of the sessions after our introduction have followed a simple format. Those responsible for presenting the current two chapters organize and run the session with the three of us in the background in supportive roles. At the end of the session, they provide the next group of facilitators with time to present a question, task, or thinking point for the following two chapters. The process and structure used to organize the book study has helped us move closer to achieving our bigger *why* in starting this book club.

We need to collectively understand the impact that systemic racism can have. We must recognize how racism can manifest in schools and we must have an idea about what equity looks like. Although the book study is not yet complete, we have learned that we can still have meaningful

conversations virtually if we plan with intention. Through the co-creation of collaborative norms and modelling these together, we fostered respect, connection, and trust. Through relationship building, we delved deeper to have participants reflect on how they see inequalities and how they can move to action. We can enjoy and learn together in a virtual space when we pay careful attention to adult learning principles.

Based on Aguilar's approach, to coach for equity there is an expansive set of abilities. These include knowledge of coaching, racism, and white supremacy; skills in coaching; the will and courage to interrupt inequities and reflect on one's own practice; capacity; cultural competence; and the skills to navigate one's own and others' emotions. Accordingly, a variety of activities were designed by group members to reflect on our own values, individual biases, and how we identify.

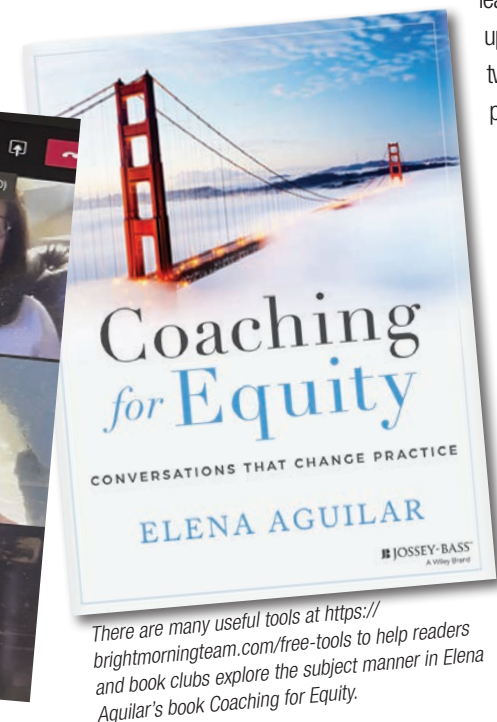
These included discussions about how we can influence the school system. For example, what compelling experiences might diverse students have beyond the Surrey-wide cross-cultural symposium? For the last four years the forum has provided a space for students to discuss race and racism throughout the district and to share their experiences and their voice. What other transformative opportunities are needed? How will the book study affect other initiatives that our district is currently engaged with, such as the Ministry of Education's Equity Scans? With Surrey Schools senior team's partnership with *Racing to Equity* we will begin to use listening circles to hear from a variety of groups and are encouraged that this is at the top of mind for Surrey Schools district leadership.

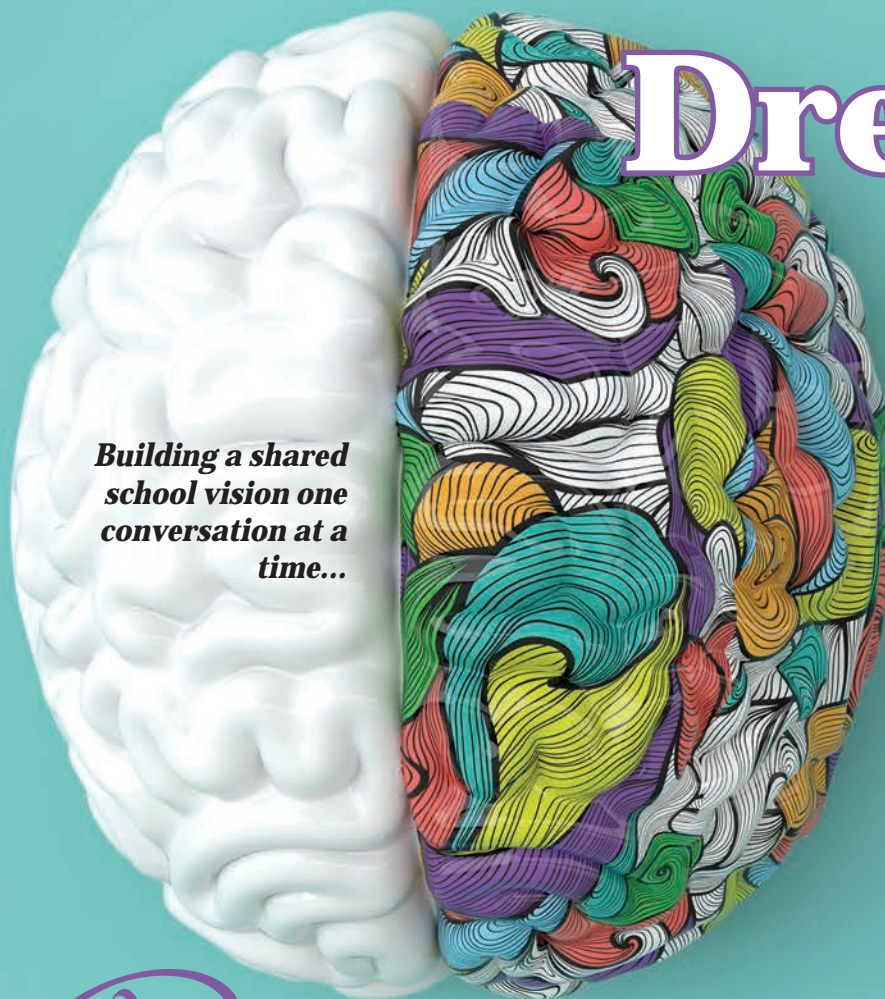
Initially, we found the theme of building bridges as depicted in Aguilar's book cover to be a beautiful metaphor for coaching for equity. Building a bridge from current reality to ideal reality takes skills, knowledge, vision, patience, courage and genuine care for others. This metaphor also raised questions on who is crossing the bridge and who is on the other side. When one of the participants played Amanda Gorman's poem *The Hill We Climb*, we identified the metaphors that resonated most. Her assertion that "today's blunders become tomorrow's burdens,"⁵ reminds us that our commitment to create space for deeper conversations and connection can really shift practice and result in better life outcomes for students. 🌈

Selma Smith is the District Principal of Student Support, Lyn Daniels is the Director of Instruction, Aboriginal Learning, and Gloria Sarmiento is the Director of Instruction, Building Professional Capacity, Surrey Schools.

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Building a shared school vision one conversation at a time...

Dreaming Big: From Imagination to Innovative Education

By Brooke Haller, Janet Carroll, and Kirk Savage, School District No. 33 (Chilliwack)

Raise your hand if you have ever gathered with educator friends around a campfire, kitchen island, or living room coffee table and posed the question, “What if we could open our own school?” Typically, the “own our own school” fantasy starts with dreaming and thinking big, with passionately expressed suggestions centered around utopian ideals like equity, inclusion, diversity, dreams of student-centred learning, inclusive yet personalized programming, flexible learning spaces, community engagement, and creative staff who would move mountains for their students.

Then, inevitably, the exhilaration wanes, the conversation peters out and turns practical. Reluctantly, the dreamers conclude their ideas are “too big.” Not *doable*. The vision slowly fades, then disappears. After all, the dreamers have

mortgages to pay, families to feed, regular jobs to attend. One day it could happen... but not yet. Or could it?

Two years ago, the vision for Imagine High Integrated Arts and Technology Secondary was sparked when the former University of the Fraser Valley campus in mid-town Chilliwack became available for purchase. Fortunately, the Ministry and the Board of Trustees had the foresight to act quickly and acquire the property. Not only would the new school solve some practical issues for the district, chiefly overcrowding at the secondary level, but now there was potential to create an innovative, secondary school of choice from scratch. It was time to dream big.

Of course, big dreams require a team of dreamers.

In the words of Janet Carroll, Program Director (Consultant)

Kirk [Kirk Savage, Assistant Superintendent, Chilliwack School District] invited me out for Thai food one rainy day in November 2019 and

pitched the idea of hiring me as the consultant for the new Integrated Arts and Technology Secondary School that School District 33 would be opening in 2021. “It’s going to be world-class,” Kirk promised, his eyes lighting up. He described plans for the facility and spoke of creating an out-of-the-box secondary learning environment that would be unique, innovative, and downright fantastic. I listened with a judicious combination of intrigue and skepticism. Big plans, I thought. I told him I would think about it.

Vision, as we know, is contagious. I caught the bug from Kirk that day and my mind started exploding with ideas. I started to wonder, “How on earth can we pull this off?” It is one thing to think outside the box, to fantasize about what could be, and quite another to put one’s money where one’s mouth is and actually do the thing that exists outside the box. The thought was alternately thrilling and terrifying. As Stephen Covey says, “The wonderful thing is that vision is greater



Exploring Imagine High, which is under construction but will open its doors this fall to students. Photos courtesy of Brooke Haller.

than baggage.” Kirk and I met for lunch again. I told him, yes, count me in.

In the words of Brooke Haller, Principal

On a random Tuesday an educator friend forwarded me a posting for a principalship in Chilliwack for a new Integrated Arts and Technology Secondary School. At the time, I was happily living and working in the southern interior desert, but the posting was irresistible. It was as if I was reading a posting for the imaginary school Kirk alluded to earlier, that every educator dreams about, but no one thinks they will ever have the chance to do in a public-school setting.

Every bullet point brought a new surge of possibility. The posting spoke to everything I had imagined school could be – innovative, integrated, and rooted in arts and technology. It was irresistible enough to inspire me to leave my role, community, and home to begin this entirely new life adventure. I was so appreciative for the partnership with Janet and the support of someone deeply connected in the valley community, and equally appreciative for Kirk’s support to dream big.

The way forward

Brooke came on board in March 2020. Now there were three of us. We had a plant

which was undergoing renovations. Check. We had a mandate (build a world-class school of choice). Check. We had the four Pillars of Integrated Arts and Technology developed in partnership with now retired Assistant Superintendent, Janet Hall. We had the Board’s strategic plan to guide our planning. We had the B.C. Curriculum and its potential. We had examples of schools from all over the world, where inquiry, project-based learning, and design thinking have transformed the way kids learn, and teachers teach. We had community partners whose expertise and enthusiasm we could harness. We had big dreams about creating a place where kids and staff could find joy, meaning, purpose, and community.

We started by asking ourselves: Who is this school for? Some kids? All kids? What do we believe about learning? About creativity? Can all kids thrive in a school where creativity is encouraged and celebrated? Is creativity different from talent? What are the pedagogical underpinnings that support the development of a creative mindset? What does the research say about the integration of arts and technology and its impact on student motivation and achievement? And, if we believe the school must be equitable and diverse and inclusive, then how do we ensure that all kids can succeed and thrive at Imagine High?

While we had a desire to offer an approach to learning that was innovative and different, we wanted to be deliberate in our planning. Yes, Imagine High is a school of choice but it was critical that students of all stripes could thrive. We believed that the kind of learning we were envisioning would be accessible to all students.

Our first step was to nail down the researched foundation for Imagine High by creating a white paper which would guide our decision-making. We researched, read articles, books, zoomed, visited schools, connected with educators in our district and beyond about the innovative practices in their schools. The three of us talked (non-stop, it seemed), emailed our ideas to each other, pushed our collective thinking, tossed around ideas (no matter how wild), shared understandings and epiphanies. We felt at times that the paper would never end, but we knew we had a road map to guide our work. Suddenly, we knew where we were going and we felt confident that the road, while less travelled, was built on a solid foundation: compassion, empathy, and human-centered learning anchor everything we do.

Our next step was reaching out to our community to contextualize our research. Most importantly, our goal was to welcome others to help co-create the Imagine vision. Our outreach was extensive, from phone calls to emails, from Zoom meetings to socially distanced face-to-face conversations. Since August 1, 2020, we have logged over 600 conversations with dozens of educators and administrators, creative entrepreneurs, community arts organizations, post-secondary scholars, community leaders, and the general public.

Our conversations involved more listening than talking as we asked our thought partners about what they imagined a school like Imagine High could be. We were inspired by beautiful stories from across the province and around the world about innovative learning environments that have been redesigned to be collaborative, authentic, personalized, student centered, and rooted in equity, diversity, and

DREAMING BIG...

inclusion. Our thought partners have challenged us to re-imagine what a secondary school could be and have helped solidify our commitment to make learning at Imagine High relevant, connected, and integrated.

The highlight of our work has been the empathy interviews with our students. We Zoomed with each registrant and their parents or guardians (plus dogs, cats, baby brothers and sisters, grandparents, and in one case, a parrot). Those conversations have been rich, moving, illuminating, and critical to both our vision and school design. Our students tell us that they want to feel connected to peers within a creative community. They are eager to show their learning in multiple ways. They have expressed a desire to go deep into their interests and passions, to try new things, to experiment, and to find meaning and joy.

By engaging with our students and families well in advance of the school opening, and listening carefully to their hopes, dreams, and fears, we are seizing the opportunity to backwards design the school to meet the needs of our students rather than preparing students to fit into the school. Student and parent voice will inform every aspect of our Imagine High learning community, from teacher recruitment to course offerings to plans for exhibitions of learning.

Vision is created through a shared narrative and, when people contribute to and see themselves in a vision, they feel a deep sense of connection and investment. While there is a need to have a clear articulation for family and community around what the Imagine approach will look like, we know that there needs to be space for grassroots innovation and maximum flexibility within the Imagine framework. In many ways, the vision for Imagine is a living document that will grow and evolve to reflect the students, families, and staff that are part of the larger Imagine community. Our school vision will never be finished because education is an iterative process that requires continuous checks and balances, organic shifts, continual evolution, and courageous learning.

Visions are delicate creatures; their growth requires authentic input, deep conversations, and a genuine desire for meaningful and honest engagement. The vision for Imagine High reflects the hopes, aspirations, and dreams of our students, parents, and the wider community. As leaders, we are stewards, not owners, of the Imagine vision. We feel confident that as our vision shifts and evolves, it is built on a solid foundation of moral purpose. The journey to realize the dream of Imagine High is on-going. The work is inspiring, challenging, and deeply important to the success of our students. The work continues, one conversation at a time. Follow our journey on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @imaginesd33! 🌈

Imagine High Integrated Arts and Technology Secondary is an innovative and vibrant school community, fostering and celebrating creativity, where students find meaning and contribute to the community within the school and beyond. This article was co-authored by Brooke Haller, Principal; Janet Carroll, Program Director (Consultant) and BCSSA Alumni; and Kirk Savage, Assistant Superintendent, Chilliwack School District.

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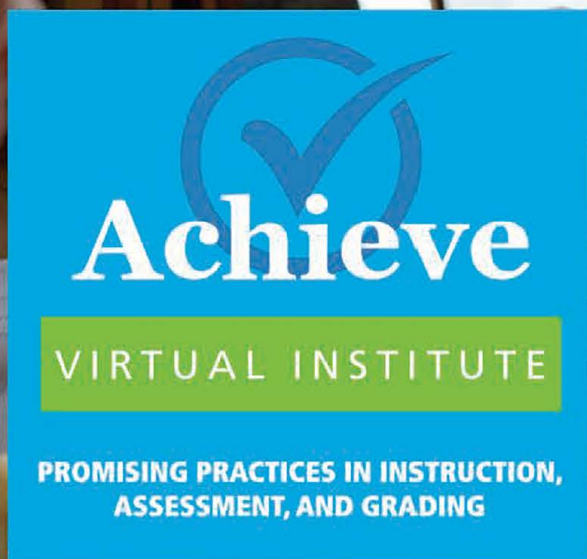
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