

Spring 2022

# InspiredED

The official journal of the  
British Columbia School  
Superintendents Association



## Community Connections

When flood waters created a crisis in 2021, school leaders and staff in British Columbia reacted the only way they could – by opening doors, cooking meals, and connecting with communities.





**BC Interior's Building  
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Featured Project

# BX Elementary School

School District #22



## Building Automation

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— Archie Stogianos, Director of Facilities, School District #22

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**Published For:**  
The British Columbia School Superintendents Association

#208 - 1118 Homer Street,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 6L5  
Phone: (604) 687-0590 / Fax: (604) 687-8118  
cguy@bcssa.org  
www.bcssa.org

**Published By:**

**Matrix Group Publishing Inc.**

Return all undeliverable addresses to:  
309 Youville Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2H 2S9  
Toll-Free Phone: (866) 999-1299  
Toll-Free Fax: (866) 244-2544  
sales@matrixgroupinc.net  
www.matrixgroupinc.net  
Canada Post Mail Publications Agreement Number: 40609661

**President & CEO**

Jack Andress

**Operations Manager**

Shoshana Weinberg  
sweinberg@matrixgroupinc.net

**Senior Publisher**

Jessica Potter  
publishing@matrixgroupinc.net

**Publisher**

Julie Welsh

**Editor-in-Chief**

Shannon Savory  
ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net

**Senior Editor**

Alexandra Kozub  
akozub@matrixgroupinc.net

**Editor/Social Media Manager**

Jenna Collignon

**Finance/Administration**

Lloyd Weinberg, Nathan Redekop  
accounting@matrixgroupinc.net

**Director of Circulation & Distribution**

Lloyd Weinberg  
distribution@matrixgroupinc.net

**Sales Manager – Winnipeg**

Neil Gottfred

**Sales Manager – Hamilton**

Jeff Cash

**Sales Team Leader**

Tanina Di Piazza

**Matrix Group Publishing Inc. Account Executives**

Andrew Lee, Brian MacIntyre, Cheryl Klassen, Colleen Bell, Frank Kenyeres, Jim Hamilton, John Price, Rob Gibson, Sandra Kirby

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Kayli Taylor

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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](mailto:cguy@bcssa.org)) with a short abstract and author information. Note, article topics are subject to approval and we will be in touch if your abstract is chosen.

### Fall 2022 Deadlines

**May 16, 2022** - Abstracts to Claire Guy at BCSSA  
**By June 13, 2022** the line-up will be finalized and authors notified.

**September 12, 2022** - Final articles due

**Please reach out for more details!**

## On the cover:

Flooding in November 2021 destroyed roads, closed businesses, and captured Canada's attention. For many communities in the water's path, schools became a gathering point – a place to eat a hot meal and connect with members of the community. This issue's cover photo, provided by Abbotsford School District, shows staff and students and the donations they collected to distribute to families that were affected by the flooding. Learn more starting on page 16.





# CONNECT WITH THE INCREDIBLE AT VANCOUVER AQUARIUM

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## A Message from the BCSSA President

It is an honour to serve as the President of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) and to be able to contribute a message to the *InspirED* magazine. In this role, I am grateful to work with the BCSSA Board of Directors and Claire Guy, Executive Director, each of whom show a deep commitment to meeting the needs of BCSSA and its members.

Throughout this pandemic we have heard that schools reflect the broader community, this of course was in relation to rates of COVID-19. However, this statement was true long before the pandemic and will hopefully remain so for years to come.

There is a beautiful connection between a school and the community(ies) it serves and represents. There is an interdependence and reciprocity that exists between them, that is mutually beneficial and strengthening.

At times this connection is unseen or unrecognized as it becomes the normal daily practice of a school. There are many examples of this bond such as:

- The class that visits a retirement village to share their learning with the residents
- Community volunteers who listen to and support young readers
- The student food drive that collects non-perishable food items and donates them to the local food bank
- The community coach who supports a sports team
- The community volunteer who builds a set and fits costumes for a theatre production
- The community-based scholarships that are provided to students at graduation

These are just a few examples from a very long list that inevitably exists in each school and district. It shows the deep connection between a school and its local community(ies).

The link between school and community(ies) is often more visible in a time of crisis. This was clearly evident in November as communities and schools were deeply impacted by the atmospheric river and the flooding that followed.

- SD58 (Nicola-Similkameen) faced unimaginable hardship due to the rain and resulting flooding. When the community of Princeton was challenged with damaged water and sewer lines, Princeton Secondary School was able to welcome the community in for showers, food, and support. In Merritt, with the inability to re-open all schools due to the flooding damage, Nicola Valley Institute of Technology opened up their campus for secondary students to resume classes.
- This kindness of community also extends across districts and into BCSSA's Chapters, which are communities into themselves. When people were evacuated from the Merritt area it was districts such as Kamloops-Thompson, North Okanagan-Shuswap, and Central Okanagan Public who sought to support those families who were displaced with food, clothing, and other necessities.
- Schools and staff in the SD78 (Fraser Cascade) opened their doors to travellers stranded by road closures, providing them with a place to rest and a meal.

As we reflect on the connections between schools and community(ies) we also need to ask ourselves:

- Are we connected to all the communities within our local community?
- Who is not connected and why?
- What systemic barriers might be keeping them from being connected?
- How can we support a connection?

Thank you so much to our colleagues who have taken the time to document their community connections through this edition of the *InspirED* magazine. Your generosity of time and spirit is appreciated and supports each of us in our work.

### Teresa Downs

President, British Columbia School Superintendents Association  
Superintendent, SD74 (Gold Trail)

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## A Message from the Ministry of Education



**Christina Zacharuk**  
*Deputy Minister of Education*

Following the retirement of Scott MacDonald in January 2022, Christina Zacharuk was appointed as the new Deputy Minister of Education. Let's find out a little bit more about Christina and her thoughts on upcoming priorities for K-12 education in B.C.

### **Tell us a bit about yourself.**

I've been with the public service since 2004 after completing a Masters in Public Administration, including co-op placements with both the federal and provincial governments. I spent my first

couple of years working in the area of Crown agency governance and accountability in a central agency in government. I then moved on to the Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat (PSEC), where I was involved with the coordination of all public sector labour relations.

These early years provided me an opportunity to work with the K-12 sector before joining the Ministry of Education in 2011 to lead the transition of the Teacher Regulation Branch into government; this role deepened my understanding and appreciation of the complex context of the K-12 system.

I was then recruited back to PSEC in 2012, becoming the CEO in 2015, where I remained until 2020 when I joined the Premier's Office. That experience provided me with insight and in-depth experience of the decision making process of government and the vast and varied issues it needs to contend with on a day-to-day basis (e.g., COVID-19 response). I was then offered the opportunity to join the Ministry of Education as Deputy Minister in January.

### **What are a few observations you have had since joining the Ministry as Deputy Minister?**

To start, how incredibly busy and complex the sector is, and how resilient and determined it is in ensuring schools are open and safe for students to attend. The sheer determination of the sector is incredibly motivating. I would extend this to the ministry and the effort and energy our staff give to support the sector. Every day I learn something new about the system, another program that supports students, another innovation by an administrator, a teacher, or support staff worker that helps our system work better and achieve great results.

### **What are the key objectives for the education sector this year?**

First, getting through this next phase of COVID-19 and understanding and preparing for what the next school year will look like

in our "new normal" world. Everyone is tired and we must support each other.

Another objective is to prioritize the collective hard work of reconciliation. This includes taking a hard look at the mechanisms that have perpetuated a culture of low expectations for Indigenous students and building a shared accountability for changing them, as well as addressing racism and discrimination.

We will also continue with the learning agenda, including understanding the impacts of COVID-19 and working on implementation of the new Student Reporting Policy. Successfully concluding another round of labour negotiations is also key. And that's just to name a few important objectives. All of these require us to continue to work together and focus on continuous improvement for all students.

### **What do you see for the future of B.C.'s education system?**

Good things! Change, and a lot of it related to the hard work noted earlier – change and continuous improvement that will take time and effort. While my focus is very much on B.C.'s education system, I also look forward to learning from the sector itself, as well as other jurisdictions and other sectors about innovative ideas that we can learn and understand for the B.C. context.

### **How do you see yourself and the Ministry working together with BCSSA to move forward joint commitments?**

I see us furthering our work together through formal structures such as the BCSSA Board and conferences, various working groups and committees, but also informally through active and transparent communication with the BCSSA president and representatives and regular sessions with the ministry and all superintendents. While we do have different roles in the education system, I do see our work as very much aligned to continuously improve outcomes for all students; we are collectively responsible and the work is best when we are doing it together.

### **Any other comments/ideas/thoughts you'd like to share with the BCSSA members?**

Just a reiteration of a heartfelt thank you for all our educational leaders. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic BCSSA members have worked incredibly hard to keep in-person learning stable and welcoming for staff and students, and I appreciate that effort and dedication – so thank you!

**Christina Zacharuk**  
Deputy Minister of Education



## A Message from the BCSSA Executive Director



**Claire Guy**  
Executive Director  
British Columbia School  
Superintendents Association

Throughout these past two years, in addition to supporting our communities, our leaders have spent significant time supporting each other, colleague to colleague, often not taking time for themselves. Consequently, I offer my thanks to our Professional Learning Committee for realizing the importance of leader and staff wellness and making it the theme for this April 2022 Spring Forum.

The theme for this edition of *Inspired* is “Community Connections” and I can’t think of anything more fitting, given the two years of pandemic and climate challenges we have experienced! Our schools and educational leaders are pillars of strength and hope in our communities and serve as a guiding light of “normal” when our “normal” was turned inside out. Throughout British Columbia, our educational leaders are the lifeline to community.

In this issue, you will read about the relationships that deepen the community connections and go far beyond the schools – virtually or in person! The way our BCSSA leaders continue to go above and beyond to enhance the lives and trajectories of students in our province is simply amazing. It has been said that “it takes a village to raise a child” and I would add that it takes a school district to support a community. I tip my hat to all our leaders who continue to rise to levels of support. Every story in this journal is filled with inspiration and our collective gratitude goes to the leaders who work behind the scenes to somehow turn potential tragedies into triumphant celebrations.

Throughout these past two years, in addition to supporting our communities, our leaders have spent significant time supporting each other, colleague to colleague, often not taking time for themselves. Consequently, I offer my thanks to our Professional Learning Committee for realizing the importance of leader and staff wellness and making it the theme for this April 2022 Spring Forum. I have been told that “Leading with a Light Heart” is a vital strategy for maintaining optimism and resiliency as we work through challenging times. Lanny Gregory and

Suzanne Hoffman, two wise friends and respected colleagues, once told me that in the public education sector, we need to be a “lighthearted place with an intense mission.” I think of their words and leadership often as they modelled this compassionate systems approach.

As I write this, I am excited to note that on April 7 we will bring our BCSSA committees and working groups together for a day of reconnecting and engaging as a professional association. It is long overdue and while we have all done a spectacular job in managing the virtual world, there is something special about those face-to-face community connections we have all been missing. I would like to thank each BCSSA member who continues to go above and beyond in their communities, districts, and for our association. We are all stronger because of you.

Until next time,

**Claire Guy**

Executive Director  
British Columbia School Superintendents  
Association

### BCSSA RETIREES

Please join us in recognizing the retirement of these esteemed colleagues:

SD5 – Superintendent, Silke Yardley  
SD35 – Superintendent, Gord Stewart  
SD35 – Director of Instruction, Dawne Tomlinson  
SD36 – Superintendent, Jordan Tinney  
SD38 – Assistant Superintendent, Lynn Archer  
SD39 – Associate Superintendent of Employee Services, Carmen Batista  
SD39 – Director of Instruction, Richard Zerbe  
SD70 – Superintendent, Greg Smyth  
SD81 – Superintendent, Diana Samchuk  
SD82 – Superintendent, Janet Meyer  
SD91 – Superintendent, Sue-Ellen Miller  
SD91 – Superintendent, Manu Madhok  
SD93 – Assistant Superintendent, Caroline Picard

This photo was taken in Goldstream Provincial Park, which is located northwest of Victoria on southern Vancouver Island. Photo courtesy of Bryan Wilton.

# Indigenous Lead

## Weaving Together our Collective Stories and Knowledges into the Fabric of the British Columbia Public Education System

education in the province to help transform how we walk together. This will enable the system to be culturally responsive and accountable to Indigenous learners, parents, caregivers, and staff.

As Indigenous educators, we know feeling seen and heard is fundamental to “being in relation.” When the education system and educators authentically live the 5Rs of Indigenous pedagogy – relationships, respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relevance – we see transformative relationships and actions evolving.

Sharing our stories takes courage. In the story that follows, Mike Bowden (Secwépemc te Pelt’íqt), District Principal of Aboriginal Education, SD73 Kamloops-Thompson, has stepped forward to share his story; one that aligns with many of the stories we carry as Indigenous educators working in school districts across British Columbia, Canada, and the Globe.

### Mike’s story

Growing up, I was taught implicitly that being “Indian” was something to avoid or to hide; that connection to the reservation and being “Indian” was dangerous. Even from my Kye7e (grandmother) and ki7ce (mother), who are Secwépemc te Pelt’íqt.

Hiding my heritage followed me as I started my journey into education and due to my paternal ancestry, it was easier as I was not an obvious visible minority. There were advantages to accessing and leveraging my

*This article was written by members of the Indigenous Advisory Table within the BCSSA. Their details can be found on page 11.*

Indigenous leadership in school districts across British Columbia is continually evolving. School districts are realizing the significance and impact of what can happen when Indigenous voice is included as part of the key decision-making team. The emergence of this critical component within districts across British Columbia ensures there is authentic Indigenous voice in all areas of the planning and implementation processes. Not only does this open the space for Indigenous perspectives and worldviews to be shared and valued, it ensures that culturally responsive governance

is in place for Indigenous educational leaders to be seen and heard within the British Columbia public education system and their local school districts.

As Indigenous educators, we are witnessing a continual increase of Indigenous leadership positions emerging throughout the public education system and in terms of equity and diversity; this is a much-needed step in the right direction. These changes are necessary because for the system to uphold culturally responsive pedagogy, leadership, and governance, Indigenous leadership needs to be woven throughout all levels of public



# Leadership as Ceremony:

white privilege. This also created conflict in myself. I tried to find a place and voice for my Indigenous identity. I did not want to be hired as the token Indigenous person like my “ability” as an educator and leader was not a real factor. I heard the talk as I was hiding in the ghost of my colonial skin – “They only got the job because they were Indigenous.”

I did not know if I had the courage to take the risk to carve a space where my voice would have agency as an Indigenous leader. What if I did not “earn” my space as an educational leader and peer. That my voice, my Indigenous leadership values, would not truly be respected or valued in a system that fought to hang onto many colonial practices.

My leadership journey more recently has brought me to a place where I have found courage through grounding in my cultural identity. I now hope my voice will be valued around the “home fires” of educational leaders. Through courageous Indigenous leadership, Indigenous ways of knowing and doing, reconciliation becomes *all* our responsibility, and not othered to a department. In my journey, I have tried to make myself vulnerable for my own self-healing to model leadership in hopes that a system will also make itself vulnerable, where we can walk alongside and lift each other up in a journey of well-becoming.

## Weaving Indigenous education into the fabric of education

While we are encouraged to see changes occurring, we also recognize this is not the case system wide. In the book *Living Indigenous Leadership*, Carolyn Kenny and Tina Ngaroimata Fraser (2012) remind us that Indigenous leadership is not about a role or position; it is about responsibility. Therefore, Indigenous educational leaders take on responsibility for the students, parents, family members, communities, and nations. This is why it is so important for Indigenous

educational leaders to feel seen and heard. When Indigenous community members witness their representatives being seen and heard in a respectful way where the 5Rs of Indigenous pedagogy are being honoured, their confidence grows stronger in the belief they too will be seen and heard by the education system they are “in relation” with.

To weave Indigenous educational leadership into the fabric of B.C. public education, we believe we must begin with the governance structures within local and provincial education systems by considering where Indigenous voice(s) sit within the decision-making structures and practices. When Indigenous voice is not present at these tables, Indigenous educators are then forced to rely on non-Indigenous educators to translate our Indigenous voice(s), considerations, and recommendations to these decision-making tables on behalf of us and the Indigenous communities we serve.

If the promise of culturally responsive systemic change is possible, those who have power and privilege in the system will need to continue to (un)learn in order to transform their relationship with those they are in service to. This work cannot be done in isolation or led by a few, but the responsibility and sustained

action needs to be shared widely across the system. By embracing new ways of being that align with the 5Rs, all levels of management, administration, and educators can deepen the ways they are in relationship to those they serve.

In response to this, one school district has created a brand-new position called the Director of Indigenous Education. This position is not a Director of Curriculum and Instruction or Director of Education Services that is then given the responsibility for Indigenous education. This is a newly created position with the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) where this school district was responsive to the Indigenous community voice(s) to ensure that an executive leadership role was created that reported to the superintendent and would have a seat at the decision-making tables to honour and uphold Indigenous voice at all levels of their education system.

As we move forward, Indigenous leaders are learning how to navigate new relationships and spaces. As we do, our identity and ways of being guide us in how we create impact in our leadership positions. How we present ourselves so we are accepted by our peers and colleagues is always a consideration. This keeps

*continued on page 12*

THE INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP SERIES, SPONSORED BY BCSSA, IS FACILITATED BY KATHY SAWCHUK. MEMBERS INCLUDE:

**Mike Bowden (Secwépemc te Pell't'iq't)**, District Principal of Aboriginal Education, SD73 Kamloops-Thompson; **Robert Clifton (Gitga'at – Tsimshian)**, Adjunct Professor & Faculty Associate, University of British Columbia – Faculty of Education; **David Delorme** – District Vice-Principal of Indigenous Education, Vancouver School Board; **Chas Desjarlais (Nehiyaw - Métis Iskewew)**, District Principal of Indigenous Education, Vancouver School Board; **Jana Fox (Blackfoot – Navajo)**, Silverthorne Elementary Vice Principal, Indigenous Curriculum & Culture District Teacher, SD54 Bulkley Valley, NOIE Indigenous Transitions Co-ordinator; **Rose Greene**, District Principal of Indigenous Education and Equity, North Vancouver School District; **Irene Issac**, District Principal of Indigenous Programs, Vancouver Island North School District; **Diane Jubinville**, District Vice Principal of Aboriginal Education Programs, Delta School District; **Dave Lafontaine**, District Vice Principal of Indigenous Learning, Vernon School District; **Dr. Shelly Niemi, (Nehiyaw – Métis Iskewew)**, Director of Indigenous Education, Greater Victoria School District; **Mary Peter**, District Principal of Aboriginal Education, Cowichan Valley School District; and **Charity Sakakibara**, Director of Indigenous Education, Vernon School District.



Students at Oaklands Elementary (SD61) drum along with Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Facilitator John Harris. They are drumming the Lekwungen Celebration Song created by Bradley Dick at the Legacy Totem Pole unveiling that was carved by Carey Newman (Hayalthkin'gme) on May 27, 2021.

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## INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP..

us cautious about how we bring ourselves to conversations. What pieces of our identity can we bring to the role that will be accepted? When doors open, we are able to take some risks, this increases our sense of what it means to be in relation. Open doors are pathways for the voice of the community to be seen and heard. While this has increased our sense of being seen and heard, we are still in the developing stage when it comes to truly understanding what it means to be in relation in culturally safe spaces.

As we continue to weave our shared stories of creating space for Indigenous educational leadership within the fabric of the B.C. public education system, we must acknowledge the courageous work of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) for walking beside us as we see your commitment to creating relationships based on the 5Rs, and to being in relation to work collectively towards reconciliation and culturally responsive and safe spaces.

*With Gratitude, The British Columbia Public Indigenous Educators Leadership Advisory Table, BCSSA*

## References:

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# Project HELLO

## Asks us to Connect With Compassion

*Whatever the problem, community is the answer. How we are  
together in our relationships is the solution.*

— Margaret Wheatley

What started as one fieldtrip  
has spiralled into  
more than a decade of  
giving in Canada's poorest  
neighbourhood: Vancouver's  
Downtown Eastside (DTES).

In 2009, Kristi Blakeway and her leadership  
students set out to make a positive difference  
in the community. They decided to volunteer  
weekly in a Coquitlam homeless shelter, and  
they planned a one-day fieldtrip to Vancouver  
to hand out food and clothing.

During their first evening at the shelter,  
Kristi and her students sat down with the  
clients to engage in conversation. Irvin was the  
first man they met. He shared that it was his  
mom's birthday. Kristi offered her cell phone  
in case Irvin wanted to reach out to his mom  
and wish her a happy birthday. Irvin politely

declined sharing that his mom had long since  
passed as had two of his sisters. Sensing Irvin's  
pain, Kristi (a school counsellor at the time) asked  
Irvin how his family members had died.

Irvin's eyes welled up as he reflected on his  
childhood. At age seven, he woke up to find his  
house on fire. He was able to save one sister who

he shared a room with. He tried to make it  
across the hall to save his other two sisters,  
but the flames were unrelenting. He was  
able to save his mother that night and  
recalls the image of her emerging from their  
home burnt yet empty handed. Fifty years

*continued on page 14*





Students help people on the streets send messages of love.



Lindsay Munro and Hudson Campbell join Kristi Blakeway on Hastings Street to send Mother's Day messages. Photos for this story courtesy of Kristi Blakeway.

## MAKING A TANGIBLE DIFFERENCE

Students of all ages have gained from this experience and many graduates have shifted career goals to enter helping professions. Mya, Sophia, and David share the impact Project HELLO has had:

"Project HELLO has opened me up to new opportunities. I've had the chance to learn and grow as a person. Project HELLO inspires me to be the best version of me." — Mya, Grade 8, SD42

"I have learned that being a kind citizen, even as a young person, can activate growth and change in the world. I have learned to look at people and their situations from a place of consideration, understanding, and empathy rather than judgment. This experience has changed my entire perspective on people and the importance of knowing people's stories." — Sophia Scarcella, SD42 Graduate, University of Victoria Student

"When people ask me why I became a clinical counsellor, my response is because of Project HELLO. At age 14 I was exposed to the power of genuine human kindness and connection, but also trauma and addiction. To this day, the hope and resilience I learned many years ago from the residents of the Downtown Eastside continues to shape my work and career trajectory." — David Jennings, SD43 Graduate, PhD student and Clinical Counsellor

later, the trauma of losing two sisters still haunts him.

In that moment, the students' perception of homelessness changed. Irvin's story demonstrated that homelessness is much more than a lack of housing, often symbolizing trauma and broken relationships.

Keith, a Grade 10 student, shared the immediate impact: "I've been sad for months about my parents' divorce, yet after listening to Irvin I realize I have so much to be grateful for. I have two parents who love me and my problems are not as big as they seem."

Days before the fieldtrip to the DTES *The Province* newspaper ran an article about all the agencies helping at Christmas. Recognizing that handouts were plentiful at Christmas, Kristi cancelled the fieldtrip. The students were devastated as they wanted to help others. This led to a conversation about the joy of giving. Kristi and her students wondered if people on the streets had any opportunities to give to others. Rather than collecting handouts, they decided to make blank handmade Christmas cards and invite people on the streets to give them away,

with the hope that at least one person would ask to write a card to a friend or family member they had lost touch with.

The idea took off and on that first day, they helped reconnect nine people with family they had lost touch with. As the students searched the internet and dialed numbers across the country, they realized they would have to go back to the streets to share messages from families. Project HELLO was born: **Helping Everyone Locate Loved Ones.**

Kristi Blakeway is now a school principal and sponsor of Student Voice in the Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows School District. Students in SD42 and SD43 participate year-round in Project HELLO. Elementary aged students create handmade cards, secondary students head to the streets inviting marginalized citizens to write to friends or family, and students, staff, and recent graduates assist by searching the internet to make connections. To date, the students have helped make over 800 connections through greeting cards, phone calls, and face to face reunions. Families who receive cards are invited to write back to the students,



sharing the impact of Project HELLO. Here is an example:

*My Dear Kristi,*

*With much emotion I read the card sent via Sahara at Laity View Elementary, Maple Ridge. It was from my long-lost daughter Miranda whom I had given up for dead. How I wept! I was 70 this month and have dreaded going out of this life not knowing what happened to my eldest child. Bless you for this work you do. There are no words of thanks adequate to express how much this means to people.*

*Sincerely,*

*Ailene*

In 2013, Kristi recognized that the five-minute conversations students were having on the streets were only scraping the surface of untold stories so she decided to go deeper, creating *Beyond HELLO* with the commitment to take one homeless person to lunch each month so that students could understand personal stories of trauma and resilience and share these stories with others in an effort to shift the perception of homelessness. These stories can be viewed online at [www.BeyondHELLO.org](http://www.BeyondHELLO.org).

Kristi has recently written a book, *Beyond HELLO: Rekindling the Human Spirit One Conversation at a Time* highlighting stories from the streets and sharing the profound impact of these powerful conversations. Proceeds go back to the community as each book sold buys a meal for someone in need.

Project HELLO and Beyond HELLO remind us to see those who are invisible and to connect with compassion. Melinda Gates, in her book *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*, says, "Every society says its outsiders are the problem. But the outsiders are not the problem, the urge to create outsiders is the problem. Overcoming that urge is our greatest challenge and our greatest promise."

In 2010, as the first year ended, Kristi and her students returned to the shelter and offered Irvin a lottery ticket wishing his luck

would change. Irvin reached in his pocket and said he had a gift too. He pulled out a tiny rock and explained that years' prior, middle school students from Port Coquitlam had offered him cookies and a tiny rock. They told him to keep the friendship rock in his pocket as a reminder the community cares. Irvin took the lottery ticket in its place and offered his rock as a reminder that he cares about the community too. May we all connect with compassion. 🌈

*Kristi Blakeway is the principal of Laity View Elementary in SD42 (Maple Ridge/ Pitt Meadows) where she oversees Student Voice and plays an active role implementing a district wide SEL Framework. She has been named Vancouver's YWCA Woman of Distinction and received the B.C. Medal of Good Citizenship for her work connecting community. School districts interested in Project HELLO/Beyond HELLO are welcome to email Kristi Blakeway at [kblakeway@sd42.ca](mailto:kblakeway@sd42.ca).*



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# Calming Communities During the Flooding Crisis of 2021

When an atmospheric river brought a relentless 615.6 millimetres of rain – 257 per cent more than normal – into the Pacific Northwest last November, it wrought massive destruction across southern British Columbia, and particularly in the areas surrounding the Fraser Valley. The initial storm, which was followed by days of heavy rain, re-filled a lake drained more than a century ago, washed out critical highway infrastructure for months, and displaced more than 15,000 residents.

A disaster of the magnitude of November's floods is not really covered within the pages of a "Superintendents' Handbook," yet British Columbia's educational leaders were up to the task and guided their teams through the worst of the situation.

"Superintendents are often called to this position because we respond well to crisis," says Superintendent Balan Moorthy, SD78

(Fraser Cascade). "It might sound cliché, but we are there to create calm amongst the storm and we tend to be people who like to problem solve. The flooding in November gave us all the opportunity – in our own ways – to make the whole situation better for everyone else."

## **Abbotsford School District**

Abbotsford School District is situated in the heart of the Fraser Valley and, when the Nooksack River south of the border rose by more than eight feet and breached the Sumas dike, it did not take long for the situation to become distressing.

Once the District's Critical Incident Response Team saw the water levels start to rise, they quickly identified two of its schools that were at ground zero and immediately shut them down with the focus on getting the kids safely home as quickly as possible, so that they would not be left stranded by the rising waters. The district team then turned its attention to

its many staff who live in the region and gave them leave to take care of their own families and circumstances.

"Part of our emergency response was to also have teachers reach out to students and just check in on them to make sure they were okay," says Superintendent Kevin Godden. "We wanted the kids to know that – while there might be a lot of stress in their family right now – there are some other people out there who care about them. Even though we might not be able to go to school for a while, we're all going to be okay."

Once the immediate urgency of the crisis had passed, and affected students were moved around to other schools within the district, there was a drive – from students and staff alike – to answer the call and help where needed within the community. Abbotsford teachers seized upon this teachable moment and provided what they were able to from within their wheelhouse to help uplift those in need.



For Godden, it was amazing to watch how different schools stepped up by organizing events like clothing drives, fundraisers for disaster relief, and – at one school – even preparing a Christmas dinner for families most impacted by the flooding.

“What was really moving for me was hearing from the parents at the table that, while they might be flooded out of their homes over the holidays, the lasting memory for their kids would be this amazing Christmas at the high school,” says Godden. “And I thought to myself: this is why we do what we do.”

### SD33 (Chilliwack)

Chilliwack was no stranger to natural disasters in 2021, having experienced a punishing heat wave, the impact of severe wildland fires, and – of course – the heavy rains and flooding. As such, the community was well positioned to step up and meet the challenge head on when the waters rose in November.

“The challenges of the last year have galvanized the community and made us stronger during times of crisis,” says Superintendent Rohan Arul-Pragasam, SD33 (Chilliwack). “In November, similar to July of last year, the whole community stepped up to volunteer their time and provide resources and goods and support one another during a time of great need.”

With a mission to promote strong school-community partnerships that use school facilities to better meet the needs of children, youth, families and the whole community, the Neighbourhood Learning Centres (NLC) that served so well during the summer forest fires to house evacuees were once again used to offer temporary refuge to people impacted by the floods. They provided food resources and emergency supplies through the Red Cross.

“Schools are much more than just the place we educate our children, and we are also there to support the wellbeing of families,” says Arul-Pragasam. “So, when disasters happen, the lines between and



We had staff driving or being bussed three hours a day to get to and from work; we had IT get a laptop to a team member in Chilliwack via fishing boat, and our partner groups were instrumental in supporting our community.”

*Photos for this story courtesy of Abbotsford School District.*



the greater community become blurred and, as a natural extension, schools reach out to support our communities, helping to enhance the level of connections that benefits everyone and lets them know that their schools are places of caring.”

### SD75 (Mission Public Schools)

Overlooking the Fraser River Valley just a few minutes north of the U.S. border, the role of SD75 (Mission Public Schools) was a little bit different in that it serves as one of the main gateways into the areas hit hardest by the flooding.

Approximately half of SD75’s employees – including Superintendent Angus Wilson – live outside Mission proper in cities like Abbotsford, Maple Ridge, Agassiz, Chilliwack, and as far away as Richmond.

The first thing Wilson did was to make sure that staff were safe, and then figure out how to get people into work for the students.

“While the flooding may have been less severe in Mission and only a small number of folks were evacuated, mudslides and water quality were significantly impacting much of our community,” says Wilson.

“The really big issue for us was when the Ministry of Transportation closed the Lougheed Highway without telling us – that’s when things got interesting. This is the main route for staff heading to and from Chilliwack and Abbotsford, respectively.”

Schools are at the heart of the community and when Highway 7 was closed off, Mission became a rallying point for the district and community alike.

*continued on page 18*



## CALMING COMMUNITIES...

As a transportation hub, SD75's staff stepped up to the task and went above and beyond the call of duty; housing displaced teachers from other communities and setting up carpools to move everyone around.

"Our people were simply amazing during this time," says Wilson. "We had staff driving or being bussed three hours a day to get to and from work; we had IT get a laptop to a team member in Chilliwack via fishing boat, and our partner groups were instrumental in supporting our community. Given all the unexpected challenges, the entire community was incredibly understanding and supportive, especially with so many staff having trouble getting to into work."

## SD78 (Fraser Cascade)

Like Mission, the community of Hope is a gateway into the Fraser Valley and is a major transportation hub that leads into the Okanagan interior. When the floods first came and the roads closed, it left approximately 1,500 people stranded in town and – almost overnight – the school in the community was asked to open as a warming centre.

"The husband of Hope Secondary's Principal, Rosalee Floyd, (who was out of town at the time) was phoned around 12:30 am to open up Hope Secondary to the community to start bringing people in because it was very cold," says Superintendent Moorthy. "All of a sudden, the school needed to become a home to families with babies, children, and dogs, and we got two staff members to open the doors that night and set up this makeshift warming centre."

At the peak of the crisis, there were up to 30 staff and community volunteers working daily to open the school and organize the food donation that started coming in from the community. Companies like Kiewit also switched into relief mode and began supporting efforts at the school, flying in food, and supplying goods and services.

"I can't say enough about the level of community support during this time; it was truly monumental," says Moorthy. "The staff were amazing – the teachers, clerical, educational assistants, Indigenous support workers, and our maintenance crew – everyone was doing everything they could to support this initiative."

Outside of Chilliwack, SD78 is an amalgamated District responsible for a vast geographical region, with a small joint initiative with SD48 (Sea to Sky) in Squamish and connected to 15 separate Indigenous communities. While Hope captured many of the headlines during the flooding, it was in small remote communities – like Boston Bar – where the need was often the greatest. In Boston Bar, the school became the central distribution site for supplies that then headed to the local food bank.

"We were called upon for leadership and direction and during this crisis, everyone stepped up," says Moorthy. "When you think about what our team has gone through in the last two years, it really does speak to the amazing education system and people we have here." 🌈



# Community Supports for Children with Autism

By Dr. Michelle Schmidt, SD36 (Surrey)

**S**D36 (Surrey) is the largest school district in British Columbia with a steadily growing population that includes a large and increasing number of students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (referred to as autism in this article). As of September 2021, there were 2,172 students with autism attending Surrey Schools.

For children diagnosed with autism, early diagnosis and appropriate intervention is associated with more positive outcomes (Dawson 2008). With this in mind, for more than 10 years Surrey Schools has been working with community partners, striving to achieve equity by providing a range of supports and evidence-based interventions for children with autism, and their families.

## Kindergarten Readiness Program

The Kindergarten Readiness Program (KRP) is a partnership between Surrey Schools and Semiahmoo Behaviour Analysts, Incorporated (SBAI). The KRP provides a community-based option for intervention services for children with autism. The program provides highly individualized Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) treatment to pre-school aged children (many of whom exhibit behaviours that are challenging), with a focus on developing the communication, social, pre-academic, and self-management skills necessary to successfully transition to kindergarten.

An extensive body of literature has documented the successful use of ABA-based procedures to reduce problem behaviour and increase appropriate skills for individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism, and related disorders (Hagopian, et. al., n. d.). In recent years, the KRP staff have followed The Preschool Life Skills Curriculum (PLS; Hanley, n.d.). The PLS program is a small group and class-wide approach to

*continued on page 20*



*The Kindergarten Readiness Program runs for 44 weeks per year, with school closures aligned with the district, with the exception of summer. Photos for this story courtesy of Michelle Schmidt.*

*"The change in our son since the program has been drastic. My happy child is back and our family feels at peace for the first time in years."*

*— Parent, as cited in a social validity survey*



*The Kindergarten Readiness Program provides highly individualized Applied Behaviour Analysis treatment for school aged children.*

## COMMUNITY SUPPORTS...

teaching critical social skills to prevent problem behaviour from developing or re-emerging. The social skills that are incorporated into the PLS program have been included because early elementary teachers identified them as critical to early school success.

In addition to running components of the PLS program, the KRP also implements Practical Functional Assessment and Skills-Based Teaching (described further on in this article). This trauma-informed, values-based approach to supporting students faced with behaviours that challenge has been implemented throughout SD36. This alignment of approaches between the KRP and the Surrey School District allows for effective collaboration and continuity of support for young children with ASD during their transition to kindergarten.

The KRP programs are funded through the Ministry for Children and Families Autism Funding allocations. As a result of their success, they run at three district sites and have expanded to include kindergarten transition and individualized long-term support. Recent research regarding the impact of this program demonstrated that participation in the KRP was positively associated with prosocial classroom engagement during kindergarten and reduced problem behaviours (e.g., self-regulation) – factors that are often cited as critical to ensuring smooth transitions to kindergarten (Marsh, et al., 2017).

### **Practical Functional Assessment/Skills-based Treatment (PFA/SBT)**

During Spring 2019, Surrey Schools presented (in collaboration with the Pacific Autism Family Network, British Columbia Children's Hospital Department of Psychiatry, the University of British Columbia (UBC) Department of Psychiatry Developmental Disorders Program, and UBC Psychoeducational Research & Training Centre) a conference with the theme of challenging behaviour in autism and related

disorders. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO)/Founder of FTF Behavioral Consulting was the invited guest, who spoke of his work conducting PFA/SBT. PFA/SBT is a collaborative problem-solving process that teaches the skills of communication, toleration, and cooperation. PFA/SBT is a trauma assumed evidence-based process that enables our most complex students to learn from a place of joy, while valuing safety, televisibility (dignity), and rapport above all else.

As a result of the evidence base (Fiani & Jessel, 2022; Whelan, et al., 2021) and positive feedback following the conference, Surrey Schools hosted a follow-up intervention during autumn 2019, which became Year 1 of this initiative. More specifically, Surrey Schools identified 36 student support teams (at 18 school sites), that were struggling to achieve safe and successful learning for their students who had significantly challenging behaviour.

The CEO/Founder of FTF and six consultants travelled to Surrey, where we brought together the students' teams (e.g., parents, Board Certified Behaviour Analysts (BCBAs), Applied Behaviour Analysis Support Workers, Teachers), for a didactic day. For two days following, each consultant worked with school teams at their respective sites, to gather information and begin intervention. We created a Microsoft Team for each of the students and each week since then, team members have uploaded implementation video recordings and data, which forms the basis of their weekly supervision and consultation, provided by FTF consultants.

In addition, team members are part of a Community of Practice led by Surrey Schools, which meets following the direct consultation to further sustain the practices with the target students and build capacity to generalize the use of PFA/SBT practices to additional school teams. As a result of this initiative, two district staff have obtained PFA/SBT credentials, staff are learning to be trainers, and one of the district's BCBAs,



*ABA Day Camps provide some continuity for students with autism during school breaks.*

as well as one of our community partners, have become Associate Consultants at FTF Behavioral Consulting. Student progress is measured across a number of dimensions using a variety of methods and tools. The associated data demonstrates that students are developing increasing numbers of critical skills and are at lower risk for severe problem behaviour.

### **ABA Day Camps**

Children with autism appreciate the structure and routine that school affords and when school is not in session, many students and their families are left struggling. To provide some continuity and ongoing intervention during school breaks, Surrey Schools partnered with local BCBAs, to offer summer camp for children in ABA home programs. ABA camps incorporate one to one ABA therapy along with outdoor activities and community outings. The ABA Camps are individually structured to focus on individualized targets, while also providing opportunity for daily activities such as arts and crafts classes, and outings

*continued on page 25*



# Family School Engagement:

## A Snapshot from B.C. – Part One

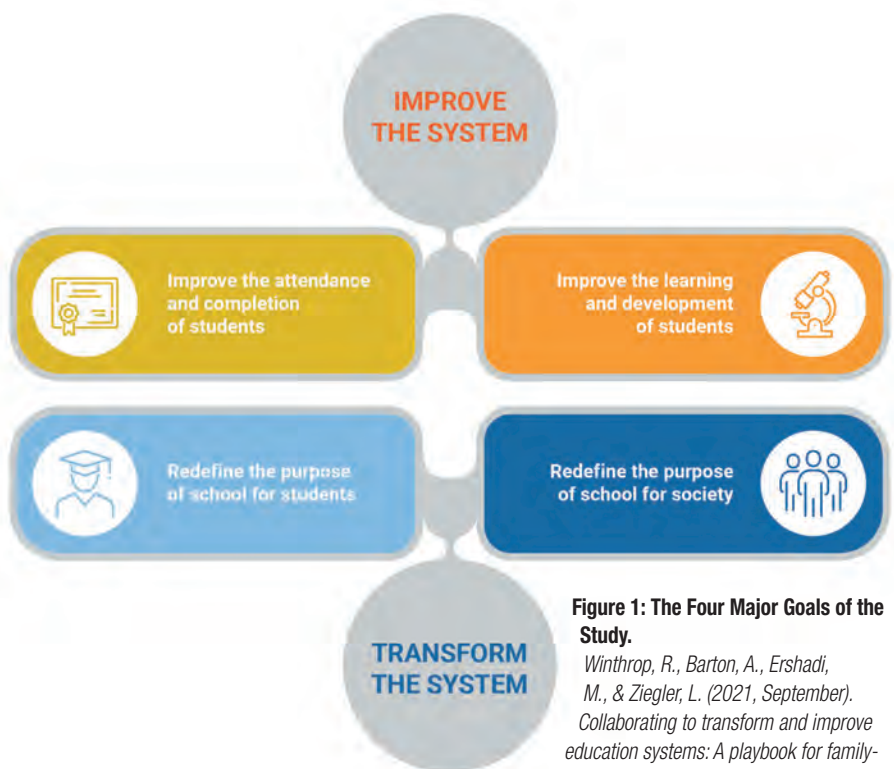
By Judy Halbert, Linda Kaser, and Paul Lorette, SD48 (Sea to Sky), and Nancy Gordon, SD37 (Delta)

The Brookings Institution is a non-profit public policy organization based in Washington, DC. Their mission is to conduct in-depth research that leads to new ideas for solving problems facing society at the local, national, and global level. Late in 2019, Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser were contacted by Rebecca Winthrop, the co-director of the Centre for Universal Education, to see if they were interested in being part of a global study on family-school engagement. Given that Linda's doctoral work focused on family school engagement, and they are both interested in whatever it takes to create greater equity in our systems, their answer was yes.

### How Did Things Start?

Some preliminary meetings took place with the Brookings team and representatives from 49 organizations across 12 countries. Four major goals were identified for the study (see Figure 1).

By the time the study was about to start, COVID-19 hit with a bang. Quickly the focus shifted to include the ways in which families and schools were working together to support young people in their learning. In British Columbia, school districts were working flat out to meet the needs of learners and their families. An additional



**Figure 1: The Four Major Goals of the Study.**

Winthrop, R., Barton, A., Ershadi, M., & Ziegler, L. (2021, September). *Collaborating to transform and improve education systems: A playbook for family-school engagement*. The Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/familyengagement>

invitation to complete yet another survey felt like a very big ask.

The timeline was tight; the Brookings team wanted surveys completed by July 2020. While we were reluctant to put out a general invitation across B.C. districts, we wanted the province to be represented. We took the plunge to contact a few district leaders individually and as a result we were able to get a good sample of responses from teachers and parents in four districts.

In the fall of 2020, focus groups to respond to some of the data were held with parents and teachers. In total, 54 parent focus groups, 36 teacher focus groups, and 50 individual interviews with decisions makers from 15 countries were held. A significant literature review was conducted, and 534 family engagement strategies were analyzed.

*continued on page 22*

**Figure 2: What are the Important Outcomes of Education?**

<b>Parents</b>	
Personal Wellbeing and Mental Health	45.6%
Critical, creative, and reflective thinking skills	37.1%
Ability to be adaptable and resilient in the face of change	30.8%
<b>Staff</b>	
Personal well-being and mental health	52.8%
Critical, creative & reflective thinking skills	36.6%
Ability to be adaptable & resilient in the face of change	29.6%
<b>Students</b>	
Personal well-being and mental health	65.6%
Post-secondary readiness	30.1%
Strong communication skills	25.8%

*Results from the Delta Vision Survey, which asked parents, staff, and students what they thought were the most important outcomes of education.*

**Figure 3: The Values of Parents, Staff, and Students**

<b>Parents</b>	
Honesty/Integrity	31.9%
Responsibility	30.2%
Compassion/Kindness	28%
<b>Staff</b>	
Diversity/Intercultural Understanding	27.7%
Responsibility	27%
Connectedness	24.9%
<b>Students</b>	
Diversity/Intercultural Understanding	32.8%
Responsibility	28.4%
Innovation/Creativity	21.1%

*Results from the Delta Vision Survey, which relate to the values parents, staff, and students felt were critical to a strong education system.*

## What Happened Next?

There were a series of meetings over the next several months with what came to be known as the Family Engagement in Education Network. British Columbia district leaders, Nancy Gordon, Paul Lorette, and Jon Rever were active participants. It was fascinating to learn about family school engagement from jurisdictions as diverse as rural India, urban Pittsburgh, and remote communities in Botswana. Strategies were shared, insights surfaced, and connections grew.

The Brookings team were hard at work collecting the data, making sense of the strategies, and ultimately developing a handbook for family school engagement that was completed in the fall of 2021. The handbook is a comprehensive resource that includes a set of 62

strategies distilled from the 534 originally collected. It also includes a set of conversation starters designed to help communities better understand the levels of alignment between the beliefs of parents and the beliefs of educators about the purpose of schooling.

## What Did we Learn?

We learned a lot – way too much to capture here! In addition to the range of strategies – from simple to sophisticated – we found that the discussions across countries about parent and educator perceptions of what is valued were deeply engaging. We encourage you to take a look at the handbook and then to open up the discussions about what is working (and what needs more attention) with respect to family engagement in your communities.

## How Can we Learn More?

The report is available on the Brookings Institute website. It's a substantial report so give yourself time to read it thoroughly. On January 17, Jon Rever hosted a webinar on behalf of the BCSSA with Rebecca Winthrop and Lauren Ziegler from Brookings. Paul Lorette from SD No. 48 (Sea to Sky) and Mike Bowden from SD73 (Kamloops Thompson) each made powerful contributions to the workshop illustrating approaches being taken in their districts.

We asked Mike, Paul, Nancy, and Jon to share some insights about family engagement from experiences in their districts and from their involvement in this study. This article contains perspectives from SD48 (Sea to Sky), and SD37 (Delta). Part Two incorporates views from SD23 (Central Okanagan) on page 23, and SD73 (Kamloops-Thompson) on page 24.

## Sea to Sky: Addressing Inequities Paul Lorette

When the Sea to Sky School District set out to address unacceptable learning inequities for learners of Indigenous ancestry, we understood that the communities we serve may not always agree on the best way forward. We knew that a thoughtful community engagement strategy would be a critical part of our strategic planning process.

Over time, we were successful in improving our secondary completion rates. However, beyond that one data point, it remains clear that students of Indigenous ancestry are still not being served in a way that provides equal opportunities upon graduation. So, with this knowledge, we push forward with the work of system redesign. Community engagement remains a critical and challenging part of this work.

As we looked more deeply at what was actually happening for our learners, we found worrisome data that revealed some problematic structures in our school district. For example, a disproportionately high percentage of students of Indigenous ancestry were enrolled in

*continued on page 26*



# Family School Engagement:

## A Perspective from Two Districts – Part Two

### FAMILY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AS A STRATEGIC LEVER TO TRANSFORM LEARNING

By Jon Rever, SD23 (Central Okanagan Public Schools)



In March 17, 2020, the government of British Columbia made the difficult decision to suspend in-person school at all public and independent schools in response to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

As students and their families adjusted to the challenge of at-home remote learning, the deeply embedded relationships and interdependencies between schools and families were suddenly revealed as the needs of students and their families became glaringly apparent.

While teachers and support staff were at home providing remote learning services, principals and vice-principals kept their schools “open” to provide care for children of essential service workers so that parents could go to work. Support staff workers discovered innovative ways to continue to provide education and mental health support services to students and their families. Parents had to adjust work and home schedules to support their student’s at-home remote learning program. School districts had to create effective systems to communicate with parents to ensure that families had the most recent information.

As the impact of COVID-19 on families started to become clearer, it was necessary

for our school district to assess current policies, systems, and structures that support our relationship with families and students. The timely invitation to participate in the Centre for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings research study on Family Engagement in Education was an opportunity to collaborate and learn from system leaders across the world.

During this time, our Board of Education was in the process of revising the school district’s Strategic Plan. As one of four strategic directions that emerged from the public engagement process, the Board identified Family and Community Engagement as a priority. The CUE research and the resulting Playbook for Family-School Engagement helped to inform the Board’s strategic directions in this area.

The following is an excerpt from the Central Okanagan Public School’s 2021-2026 Strategic Plan.

#### Family and Community Engagement

We honour the knowledge and experience that families and the community bring to our schools. By partnering together to improve student learning, opportunities for deep and meaningful engagement will emerge that supports, enriches, and

nurtures each child in our care from cradle to career. We will achieve this through:

#### ***Authentic and generative family and community engagement***

- Focus on student learning and school improvement through relational trust.
- Engage families early and often as partners alongside the school, strengthening the school and family’s capacity to support their child’s education and growth at any age.
- Ensure opportunities to guide and provide mutual input on important decisions and planning.

#### ***Value added community partnerships***

- Nurture culturally responsive, reciprocal relationships over time, benefitting each child, each school, and the greater community.
- Co-create opportunities to enrich student learning out in the community and alongside educators in schools.
- Build collective efficacy with organizations to enhance student supports and wraparound services.

#### ***Assurance in public education***

- Develop a welcoming culture built on relationships, mutual trust, openness, and transparency.
- Effectively communicate with families and partners.

*continued on page 24*

This work has begun to influence district and school leaders as they work to align their schools and departments with the Boards' strategic direction to enhance family and community engagement across the district.

Influenced by *The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*<sup>1</sup>, Principal Jim Laird, from Canyon Falls Middle School, has developed learning sessions for parents to engage the school in meaningful dialogue about the mission, vision, and values of the school. At École Hank Grenda Middle School, Principal Michelle Relova and her team conducted empathy interviews with families in the Lake Country Community guided by the question, "How can we build parents' confidence to engage with school staff?"

Two major themes emerged from these empathy interviews:

1. Parents and teachers would like more opportunities to connect informally and to share positive experiences.
2. When input is valued from all partners, and effort is made to ensure all perspectives are honoured, confidence is increased.

As a result of our collaboration in the CUE's research study on

family engagement, we have learned that the role of families is a critical consideration in our work to transform learning for all students. Specifically, the CUE study on family engagement<sup>2</sup> has highlighted the following:

#### **Improving education systems**

- Schools with strong family engagement are 10 times more likely to improve student learning outcomes.
- Communicating with families can be one of the most highly cost-effective approaches.

#### **Transforming education systems**

- Redefining the purpose of education – one of the most powerful levers for sustainably transforming systems – requires participation by the whole community.
- Deep dialogue with families and schools is needed to unlock systemwide transformational processes.

In Central Okanagan Public Schools, the Board of Education has recognized the critical importance by identifying Family and Community Engagement as a strategic priority to transform learning for all students. We are grateful to have been included as collaborators in the Centre for Universal Education at Brookings research study on Family Engagement.

## **INDIGENOUS FAMILY VOICES FOR EDUCATION**

**By Mike Bowden (Secwépemc te Pellt'iq), SD73 (Kamloops Thompson)**

Inequity of outcomes for Indigenous learners have long been documented in British Columbia. This reality was no different in SD73 (Kamloops-Thompson). Despite considerable movement to improving school completion for Indigenous learners, the school district continues to be challenged with having all students cross the stage with dignity, purpose, and options.

In 2019-2020, the district, as a result of the B.C. Ministry of Education Equity Scan, saw gaps in parent engagement and voice. We began examining ways to better engage Indigenous learners, parents, and communities and we started to look at systemic barriers. Traditionally, the system leveraged Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) as a method of including parent voice. Diving deeper into the data, it was apparent that the existing PACs were significantly underrepresented by Indigenous parents. Furthermore, the structure of the PACs created barriers for many families and caregivers.

Early in 2020, the school district decided to make space for Indigenous parents and caregivers to engage in a meaningful way. We put a call out to parents and caregivers of Indigenous students to see if there was an interest in forming an Indigenous parent and caregiver group, which would be supported by the Aboriginal Education Council, Board of Education, and senior Administration. The first Indigenous parent / caregiver executive was formed in the Fall of 2020.

As the Indigenous parent and caregiver executive began the work of forming bylaws, the parent and caregiver group encountered its first barrier from the *School Act*, which only provides one District Parent Advisory Council and one Parent Advisory Council at each school. There was no space in policy and governance for a formation of a separate Indigenous parent or caregiver group to have agency within the public school system.





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Despite this, the school district proceeded in supporting the formation of the Indigenous Parent and Caregiver group. The parent group named itself the SD73 Indigenous Family Voices for Education (IFVE). This name was selected to honour the Indigenous ways of multiple caregivers in a child's life as well as acknowledging the current systemic policy and governance restrictions in the *School Act* to formally refer to itself as a PAC.

Currently, in the Spring of 2022, SD73 Indigenous Family Voices for Education meets monthly as an executive and every second month as a general group. Doing so virtually has allowed for the inclusion of parents across the district, including representatives from rural communities. They have a Member-at-Large seat at the District Parent Advisory Council and have been included as a district stakeholder to consult on the development of the District Strategic Plan, Continuity of Learning Plans for the pandemic, and recently for decisions around vaccinations. They have a representative trustee on the Board of Education and the District Principal of Aboriginal Education attends their meetings.

The SD73 IFVE have developed a Facebook page that communicates specific events and supports for Indigenous parents and caregivers. It has created a venue that has not existed in the past, for parents and caregivers to gather and share ideas on how to positively enhance and support learning for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners.

As an introduction and welcome to the 2021-2022, the Indigenous Family Voices for Education put together 3,100 medicine pouches that were smudged through local ceremony by a local Knowledge Keeper with an educational message shared by video for each self-identified Indigenous student. The medicine pouches went home with a message of encouragement and introduction from SD73 IFVE. They also supported and helped develop five Indigenous parent engagement sessions, offered virtually in the evening during the 2021-2022 school year.

In the words of SD73 IFVE, "We believe that culture, diversity, and inclusion is important in developing strong and positive relationships within the school district." Our mission is "to create a greater understanding of Indigenous peoples and their culture, values, beliefs, and practices by lending our Indigenous voices, perspectives, and knowledge." Our vision is "to create an inclusive and diverse Indigenous community that will raise and uphold all children through education."

By creating space, agency, and voice, the school district has already noticed through anecdotal feedback, an increase in trust and relationship with parents. Some parents have begun to reengage with their local Parent Advisory Council. There have been comments from Indigenous parents and caregivers on the path this has taken to transform and change the public education system and reconcile it with past trauma and histories in Canada around public education, while rebuilding trust and relationships for Indigenous peoples.

Our hunch is that this will be one journey to create equity in our system so that all students can cross the stage with dignity, purpose, and opportunity.

## References:

1. Mapp, K. L., & Kuttner, P. J. (2013). *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*. SEDL.
2. Collaborating to Transform and Improve Education Systems: A Playbook for Family-School Engagement. <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/collaborating-to-transform-and-improve-education-systems-a-playbook-for-family-school-engagement>. 


such as trips into the community to enjoy time in water parks, pools, or at the beaches. Parents are quick to express their gratitude for the camp, with the only complaint being that the duration of the camp should be longer! The first ABA summer camp was held in 2010, and as a result of the success, in 2018, the consultants began offering a spring camp.

## Assessment for Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder

SD36 (Surrey) is an extremely diverse district, with nearly 200 languages other than English identified as the language spoken in homes. For many newcomers to Canada, access to health care may be impacted by economic challenges, difficulties in connecting with a family doctor, as well as a fear of government agencies and a history of oppression and discrimination.

Families may also have experienced limited pre-arrival health care, lack familiarity with the Canadian health care system, have limited awareness of complex health insurance eligibility and entitlement rules, and experience challenges navigating government bureaucracies. For many families, the attached stigma and/or misconceptions also dissuade them from accessing diagnostic services.

Early intervention, particularly in relation to autism, is associated with more positive outcomes, and the timelier the diagnosis, the earlier families are able to access community-based autism funding. As of December 1, 2021, according to the Provincial Health Services Authority, the wait time for an autism assessment is approximately 84.7 weeks. To assist families, Surrey Schools has created a multi-disciplinary (e.g., paediatrician, occupational therapist, registered psychologist, interpreters, and multi-cultural workers) Autism Assessment Team. Team members meet parents where they are at, taking time to understand and address any questions or concerns.

We are always striving to envision and develop future relationships with the goal of continuing to remove barriers, to ensure that children and their families have access to needed supports that enable them to achieve their potential. We are currently working on a collaboration with British Columbia Children's Hospital to host a self-injurious behaviour clinic this summer and look forward to working with many more community partners. To quote Mother Teresa, "None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful." 

*Dr. Michelle Schmidt is the Director of Instruction, Student Support, for SD36 (Surrey Schools).*

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courses that limit post-secondary options. Once this was recognized, schools re-organized to provide additional supports for students to be successful in courses that open more doors to post-secondary options. Recognizing, naming, and addressing systemic barriers to student learning and equity is challenging work and requires a thoughtful and sensitive approach to community engagement.

The Brookings Institution study offers high level foundations for community engagement, particularly for discovering common ground. The findings of the study are timely and relevant as school districts take on the critical work of creating more equitable systems. This couldn't come at a better time, as the work of bringing together people with different perspectives to engage in strategic planning through the lens of equity and diversity is truly urgent.

### SD37 (Delta) Creating a New Vision Nancy Gordon

When the offer came from the Brookings Institution to take part in a study on family engagement, SD37 (Delta) made it a priority. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the topic of family engagement as a leverage to improve results for students aligned well with the direction of our district.

Between April and June of 2021, the district embarked on a comprehensive vision-building process. Without family and school engagement connected to district priorities, the district would stand little

chance of realizing our goals. When Vision 2030 was unveiled in October 2021, family engagement was at the core.

The findings from the study from the Brookings Institution were fascinating in that there were considerable differences among the results from the participating countries. Similar to the findings of the Brookings' study, we discovered that while there were some common understandings between parents and staff on what was valued in education, there were also some significant discrepancies between home and school in what values were prioritized as important.

For example, one question on the Delta Vision survey explored perceptions about the most important outcomes of education. While parents and staff were aligned in their top three responses, students expressed some different opinions (as shown in Figure 2, on page 22).


Although all three groups prioritized personal well-being and mental health as a critical outcome of education, the variation in how parents and staff viewed the priorities of education versus how students ranked the priorities speaks to the importance of students being equal partners in dialogue designed to build common understandings between home and school.

Further, when analyzing the Vision Survey results related to the values parents, staff, and students felt were critical to a strong education system, we noticed some significant differences (as shown in Figure 3, on page 22).

The distinction that the Brookings research has drawn between family

"involvement" versus "engagement" shows that while schools may be very good at *involvement*, there is likely much work to be done when it comes to creating true family *engagement* that includes the voices of students.

Larry Ferlazzo, 2021, makes a clear distinction: "To create the kinds of school-family partnerships that raise student achievement, improve local communities, and increase public support, we need to understand the difference between family involvement and family engagement. One of the dictionary definitions of involve is "to enfold or envelope," whereas one of the meanings of engage is "to come together and interlock." Thus, involvement implies doing to; in contrast, engagement implied doing with."

We plan to use the knowledge gained from the Brookings Institution study to determine how best to work with the structures that exist in our system (or even develop new structures), to deepen the relationships between home and school. Common definitions, goals, and expectations between home and school will ultimately lead to improved outcomes for our students – especially if the voices of our youth are central to the conversations. 

*Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser lead the Transformative Educational Leadership Program, at the University of British Columbia. Paul Lorette is Assistant Superintendent for SD48 (Sea to Sky). Nancy Gordon is Assistant Superintendent for SD37 (Delta).*

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