



NEWS RELEASE

‘Blazing a path in Aboriginal education’

Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) and School District No. 48 renew five-year agreement

SQUAMISH, B.C. (Oct. 13, 2017) — They’re working together to create a bright future for Squamish Nation students by fuelling pride in Skwxwú7mesh culture – and the results, so far, have exceeded all expectations.

Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) and School District No. 48 (Sea to Sky) have renewed a five-year protocol agreement that will continue to drive forward one of the most successful collaborations for Aboriginal education in history.

“Squamish Nation and School District No. 48 are blazing a path for Aboriginal education,” said Squamish Nation Councillor and Spokesperson Chris Lewis. “The rest of the world should know about this success. It really is a beacon of hope.”



On the grass outside beneath the Chief during the Cultural Journeys program.

“School District No. 48 is committed to enhancing Aboriginal student success and supporting local First Nation communities,” explained Superintendent of Schools (SD48) Lisa McCullough. “Our corridor is rich in community partnerships, like the great relationship we have with Squamish Nation, which help us to align our efforts on behalf of Aboriginal children. We gain from the wisdom of local cultural advisors and Nation elders. Our School District’s high yield strategies for Aboriginal students include, but are not limited to, a pervasive and inclusive education plan, a collaborative approach to teacher planning and classroom support, a focus on local culture and language in all classrooms, Aboriginal Ways of Knowing embedded in daily classroom practices, a robust Aboriginal Youth

Leadership Council, and a data team focused on vulnerability reduction which meets with schools regularly to go over the results for each child.”

Thanks to efforts of teachers, Aboriginal support workers and administrators who collaborate with Squamish Nation Education Department staff, Aboriginal students had an 81.7 per cent six-year secondary school completion rate in 2016, up dramatically from 39 per cent in 2010. The provincial six-year completion rate for all students is 83.6 per cent and for Aboriginal students, it is 63 per cent.

“The community plays a crucial role in this success by supporting the students,” Lewis said, noting Squamish Nation programs, Chiefs and Council members and especially families all help the youth succeed.

Aboriginal support workers meet with students to ensure they take the right courses to keep the doors open for post-secondary education and to encourage them use their gifts and talents. Data teams track each individual student toward success and make detailed plans to support each vulnerable child.

Squamish Nation also worked with School District No. 48 to launch the Iya7yulh-Chet Cultural Journeys program, which immerses students in Skwxwú7mesh language and culture while also teaching other academic subjects. The program was proposed by Squamish Nation when Stawamus School was slated for closure. Chiefs and Council praised School District No. 48 for keeping the school open and starting programs that give Skwxwú7mesh children pride in their heritage and teach all children about Skwxwú7mesh culture.



Student Laurie Lewis

Another great success from the collaboration has been the Aboriginal students' participation and leadership in the Pala7lhkalh Stélmexw Aboriginal Youth Council. About 80 students have joined the council, which spends time learning all year and then organizing the annual 24-Hour Drum. The 24 Hour Drum brings awareness to significant issues of First Nations people, endeavors to teach the community about the issues, and celebrates successes, culture and language. These students have even had several opportunities to present at Provincial and National conferences.

School District No. 48 also has an Aboriginal Education Council comprised of Board of Education Trustee and Chief and Council representatives, and an Aboriginal Education Committee that include school administrators, teachers, Skwxwú7mesh elders, Squamish Nation staff, other Nations' staff representatives and elders, and other leaders working to improve the quality of education for Aboriginal students in the district.

Another important initiative is the Shared Learnings committee, which is made up of one teacher representative from each school in the district, elders, cultural resource people from the local First Nation communities and the District Principal of Aboriginal Education. "We work collaboratively weaving local Aboriginal traditional knowledge, resources, instructional practice and people together to deepen Aboriginal understanding about the impacts of colonization on Aboriginal communities today as a result of Canada's shared history," explained Susan Leslie, District Principal of Aboriginal Education. "At every school throughout School District No. 48, Shared Learning teachers are doing amazing work in deepening Aboriginal understandings and building capacity through Aboriginal Inquiries."

Skwxwú7mesh students now stand tall and walk with pride, which has had a positive effect on their grades and their leadership in the community, according to the Squamish Nation Education Department.

Both Squamish Nation and School District No. 48 will continue to build on this strong foundation and the work of past leaders and community members.

"This is good news," said Lewis, "but we must continue to improve the education system for Skwxwú7mesh students so they have the opportunity and ability to lead us toward a better future."

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