



s7ulh wa nexwniwéyah
Our Ways of Education

A Community Vision for Skwxwú7mesh Education

What Our People Shared During Community Conversations, 2024 to 2025

A Brief Recap of Our Initiative and What This Booklet Covers

What is s7ulh wa nexwni'wéyalh (Our Ways of Education)?

- s7ulh wa nexwni'wéyalh (Our Ways of Education) is our Nation's commitment to lead, govern, and shape education in alignment with Squamish values, language, and future generations.
- As you may know, Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw is **one of the seven First Nations in British Columbia to take back control of community education.**
- This means we have law-making authority over our preschool to grade 12 community on-reserve education, including:
 - Courses required for graduation.
 - Teacher certification.
 - Creating learning plans and lessons.

Benefits of having control of our community education:



Our Children

Our mé'nmen will be taught based on a Skwxwú7mesh worldview and grow up confident in our values.



Our Curriculum

More culture, land-based learning, and Skwxwú7mesh ways of knowing.



Our Language & Culture

We will protect, promote and revitalize our language and culture for future generations.



Our Teachers

We will qualify our own teachers.



Our Future

Never again will our children's education be taken away from us.

What's in This Booklet?

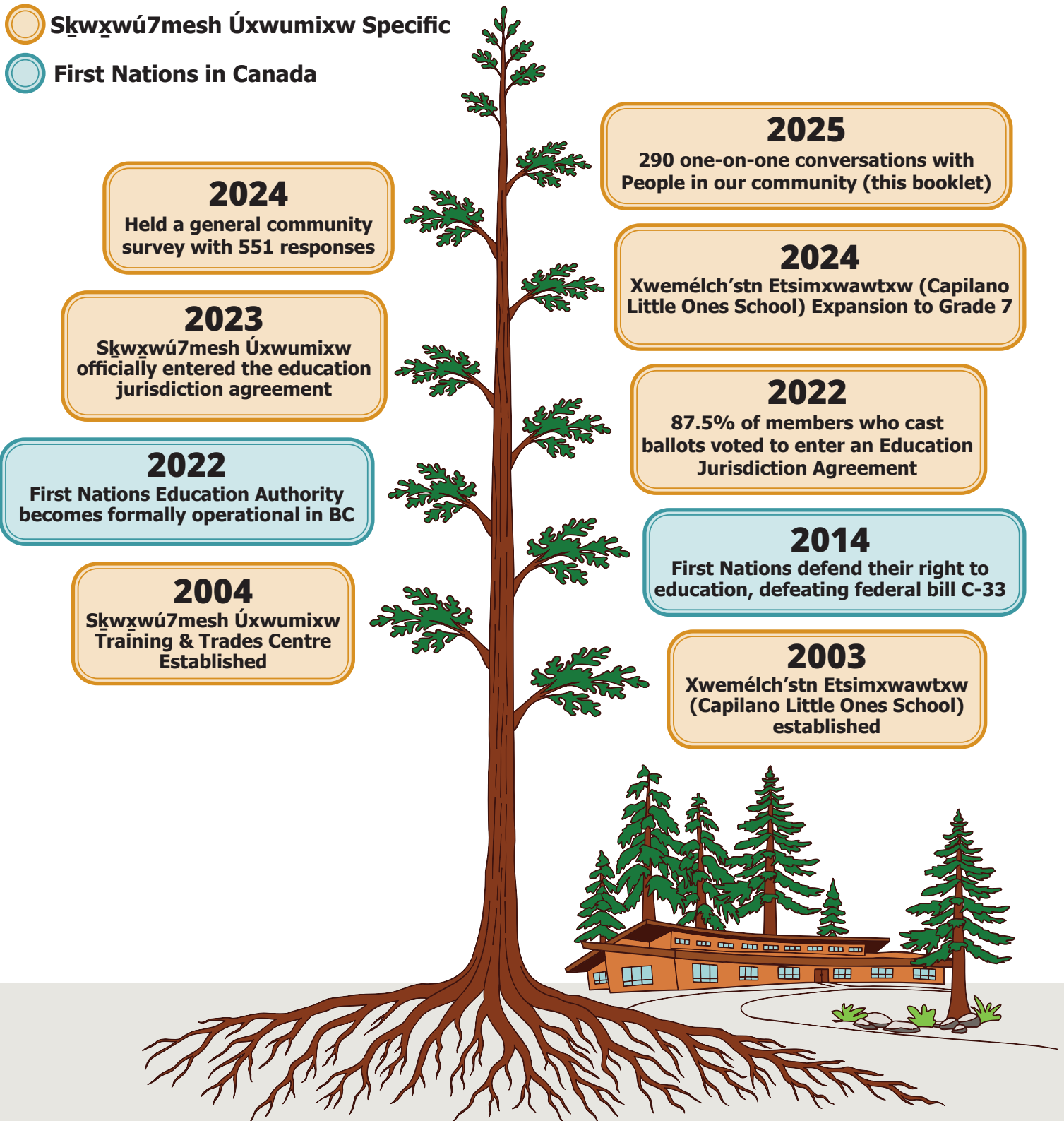
Jaymyn Lavallée and Larry Kelso collected and analyzed the data contained in this report with the support of Dr. Melanie Nelson (Samahquam), her graduate student Antonia Soldovieri, and early work from Beringia Community Planning. Melanie led the report writing with the support of Antonia and with guidance from Jaymyn, Larry, and Kirsten Baker-Williams.

With gratitude to Late Kollette Douglas for her help early on with the interviews, and a big thank you to Paul Wick, Sharon Roling, Monica Ann Jacobs, Brad Baker, Syeta'xtn Chris Lewis, the education advisory committee, and many others who have put in the work to get us to this point. As well as to everyone in our community who has given their perspective and guidance.

We hold our hands up to everyone who has had a part in this work.

Key Moments the Growth of Skwxwú7mesh Education

- Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw Specific
- First Nations in Canada



1968 Totem Pre School Established	1969 Language classes taught in evenings	1972 Language classes taught to students at highschool	1970s Capilano Nursey School	1992 Eslha7án Learning Centre established
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Three Pillars of s7ulh wa nexwni'wéyah

Three foundational pillars to our work, as identified by our people

Our People's Education

s7ulh wa nexwni'wéyah (Our Ways of Education)



Examples:

- Squamish language learning.
- Cultural & Land-based learning.
- Elders & Knowledge Keepers included.
- Arts, stories, and traditions.

Leads to:

- Strong identity and pride.
- Connection to culture.
- Respect for our history and each other.



Examples:

- Strong reading, writing and math skills.
- Developing critical thinking skills.
- Career and post-secondary pathways.

Leads to:

- Lifelong learners.
- Future ready skills.
- Confident & capable graduates.



Examples:

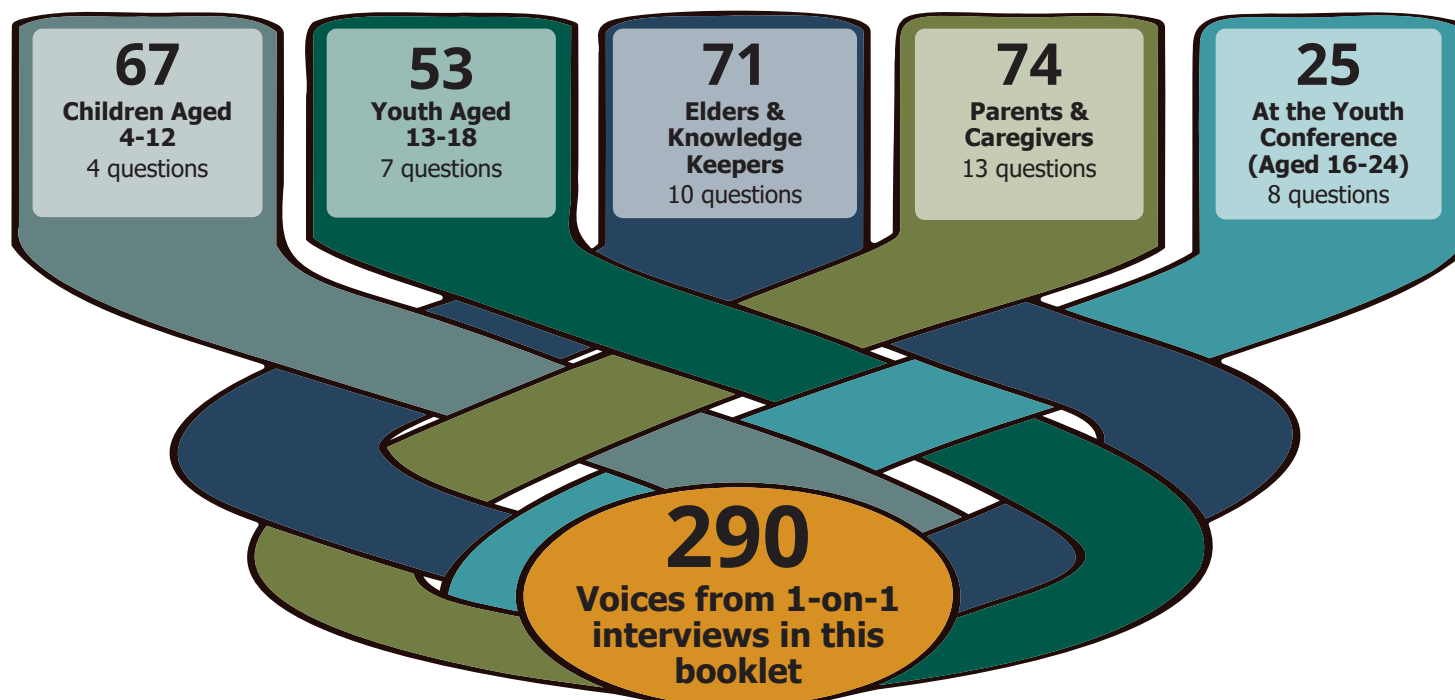
- Inclusive classrooms and teachings.
- Mental health and wellbeing.
- Family and community involvement.

Leads to:

- Sense of belonging.
- Wellbeing and resilience.
- Equitable opportunities for success.

Weaving Our Voices: Who we talked with

- Timeline: April 2024 to October 2025.
- This booklet will go over the similarities, differences and common themes shared from the age groups of our People:

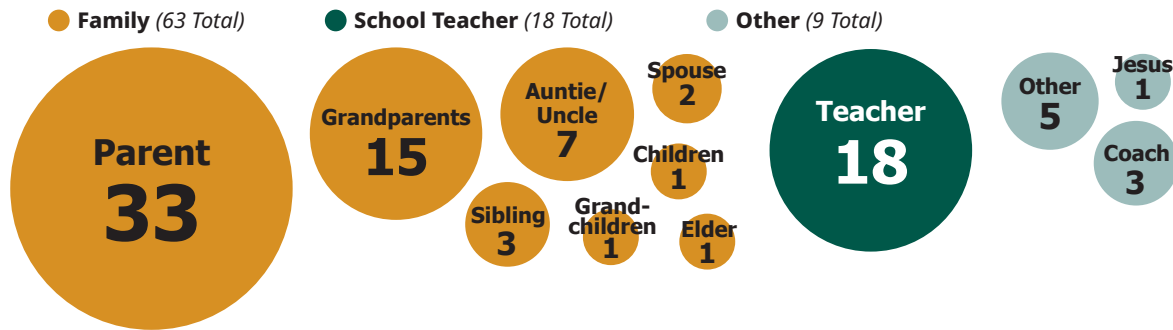


Who do our Elders & Knowledge Keepers look up to as educators?

Groups included:

Elders and Knowledge Keepers

- A teacher or educator may be anyone who teaches valuable lessons or skills, and can come from many places in our lives.
- We asked **"who is your greatest teacher in life?"**:



Kiyo-wil,
Gwa'yamgalisama'yi,
Bob Baker



Wagitame,
Gwen Harry

4 common themes of **why the person is such a great teacher in their eyes:**

Many are Indian Residential School Survivors

Many were Squamish

They empowered their children

Specific teaching qualities were listed

Indian Residential School Survivors

- 1 in 5 Elders and Knowledge Keepers we spoke with named a Residential School Survivor as their greatest teacher in life.

“My grandpa, I loved hearing him speak the language it touched my heart. My mom she was a residential school survivor she gave me the determination to get a university degree.”

“My mother. Her resilience, she survived residential school. She survived the violence that she endured from my father even though the culture, language and traditions were taken away.”

Being Squamish

- 2 in 3 Elders and Knowledge Keepers told us their greatest teacher in life is a Skwxwú7mesh Person, mentioning:



Empowered Their Education

› Elders and Knowledge Keepers talked about their greatest teacher in life empowering their education.

Inspired them to pursue their education

Fought for improved education

Inspired them to go to university

Specific Teaching Qualities

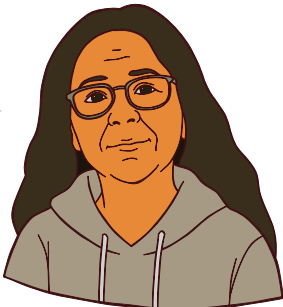
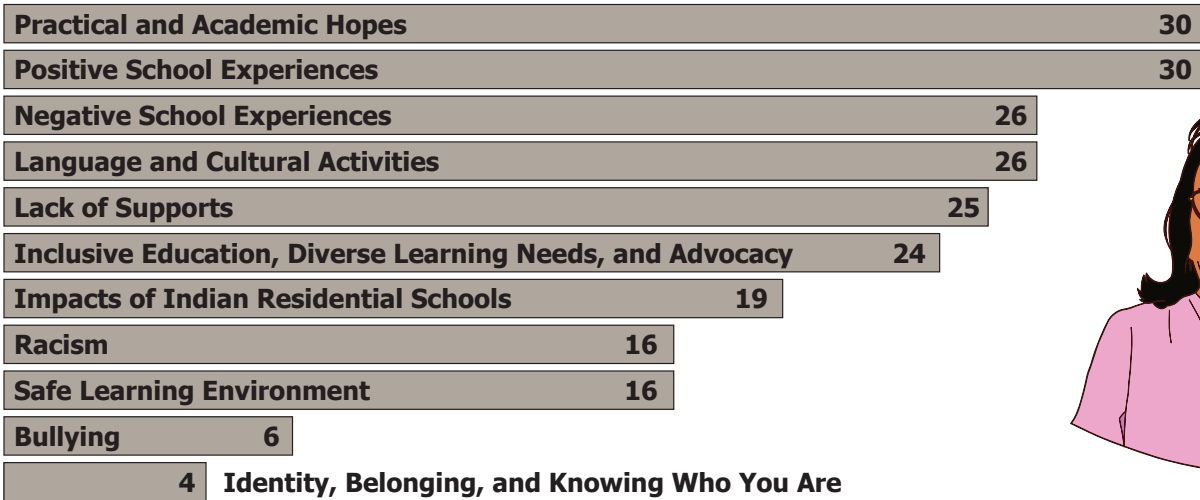
› Elders and Knowledge Keepers shared specific qualities that their greatest teacher had. Here are a few of the quotes shared:

- ““ Together, my mom and dad gave me the gift of knowing my roots, ceremonies, and responsibilities. They showed me identity, culture, and strength, not just through words, but through living example.””
- ““ My grandmother got to know me to be able to teach me the way she knew that I would learn. I didn’t understand it at the time, but looking back on it, she taught me in the way that worked for me.””
- ““ My grade 7 teacher made sure everyone was included. He organized plays during lunch where we wrote scripts and performed.””
- ““ My greatest teachers were my parents. My dad was persistent about teaching us our ancestry. He made sure we always knew where we came from.””
- ““ Mr. Wilson was his name in grade five. He was a native man, and my mother and father knew of their family, and he was the only native teacher that I knew of throughout my educational field, and he was always there to help and willing to reach out for extra help.””
- ““ My Uncle, he taught us language and told stories.””

What Does the Word “School” Mean to Our Elders & Knowledge Keepers

Groups included:
Elders and Knowledge Keepers

› When speaking about **their own experiences**, they mentioned:



Tiaoutenaat,
Jackie Williams



Doreen Baker

What Elders Experienced In School

Residential schools

- Physical violence (strap, ruler), sexual predators, lost language and culture.

Negative School Experiences

- Did not belong, struggled (attention, reading, writing), did not align with home, treated poorly, did not learn basics, poverty.

Lack of supports

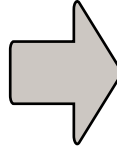
- Didn't get support for school-age and post-secondary, counsellors, high functioning students, cultural support.

Racism and not feeling safe

- Did not belong, struggles (attention, reading, writing), did not align with home, treated poorly, did not learn basics, poverty.

Bullying

- A lot of bullying, home schooled because of bullying, bullied in elementary and middle school, focused on not being different.



What Elders Want for Our Students

Language and cultural activities

- Strong identity, Skwxwú7mesh history and cultural pride.

Positive School Experiences

- Having Squamish language class, Indigenous support workers, family support, play sports, enjoy learning, fun high school.

Inclusive Education, Diverse Learning Needs, and Advocacy

- Visual learners, oral learners, hands-on learning, more help for kids with diverse learning, adaptations for those who learn differently, all supports should be in school.

Safe Learning Environment

- Sense of belonging, safety, community feeling, no one falls through cracks, no kids getting lost, free from prejudice.

Identity and belonging

- Know who you are & where you came from, mentors for kids, enabled to live to their potential, appreciate culture & language.

Fast Forward to 2030: Walking into the New School

Groups included:

Elders and Knowledge Keepers | Parents and caregivers | Youth (ages 13-18)

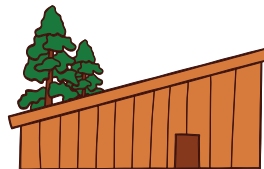
- When asked to **imagine what it would be like to walk into a new Squamish School in 2030**, all the age groups emphasized:



Cedar seen throughout



Squamish Language everywhere



Longhouse & community gathering



Artwork and carvings



Smell of cedar & forest



Calm, peaceful and bright building



Warm and welcoming



Sense of community & support



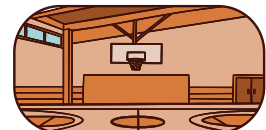
Thoughtful support workers



Food program for everyone



Good communication with students and community



A school with its own gym

Skw̓xwú7mesh Ways of Being in the New School

Groups included:

Parents and caregivers | Youth (ages 13-18) | Youth conference

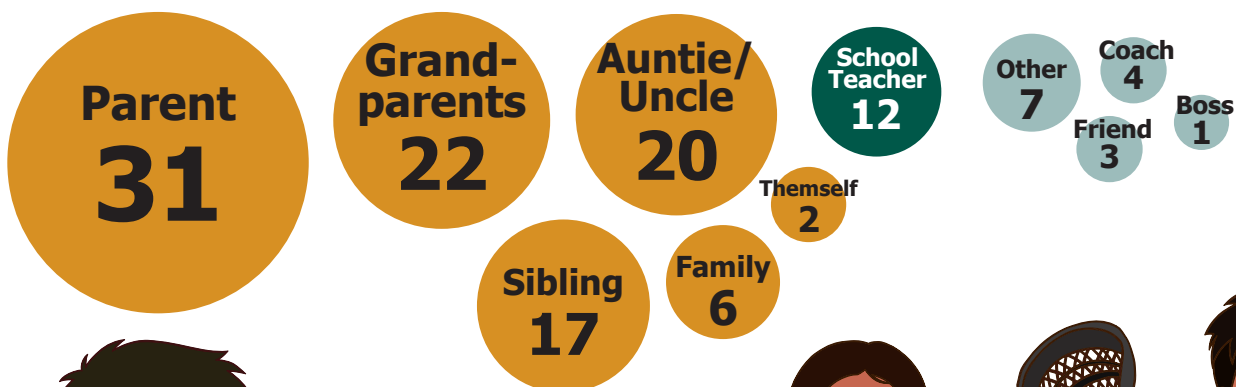
- If someone were to say **“that person has a good Squamish Education,” what does that person know or understand?**
- What people said was consistent across the age groups, highlighting that the person has or is:

Grounded in cultural teachings and language	Understands our language and shares with others	Attends longhouse and other Squamish celebrations	Learn from Squamish teachers, support workers, and leadership	Involved with Elders and intergenerational teachings	Focus on being proud to be Squamish
Know Squamish history	Understand the history of colonization	Feel safe and be free from racism	Build financial, trade, and/or life skills	Develop skills for connecting with others	Has learned leadership skills and experience
Hold a balance between knowledges	Have their natural gifts and journey nurtured	Basic needs are met	Include diverse learning support	Focuses on emotional and spiritual well-being	Be taught by quality teachers with good approaches

Who Do Our Children and Youth Look Up to as Educators?

- Supporting children’s growth is a shared responsibility, with the community and educators working together to inspire learning and help children realize their gifts.
- When asked **who their greatest teacher in life is**, children and youth named:

● **Family Related** (98 Total) ● **School Teacher** (12 Total) ● **Other** (15 Total)



Why Children and Youth Said Their Favourite Teacher or Adult Outside of School Is So Great:

Provides Support	Has a good teaching style	Gives them positive feelings	Is safe and understanding	Meets their needs	Has good teaching qualities
Have leadership qualities	Provide life guidance	They have and share cultural teachings	Foster belonging & connection	They are inclusive	Teach about life

What Does a Good Day at School Look Like?

Groups included:

Children (ages 4-12) | Youth (ages 13-18) | Parents and caregivers | Youth conference

Here are some of the most common reasons a day at school is good:



Being outdoors



Having unstructured time



Specific events



Positive social connections



When they get support for learning



Food



Connection to culture & learning the language



When they use their strengths



Squamish identity & knowing who you are



Enjoy learning



Play



Support for wellbeing



Academic Success



Sense of safety, community, and belonging



Opportunity for creativity (e.g. art)



Feeling caught up on work

Skwxwú7mesh Parents Own Past Experiences & Future Hopes

Groups included:

Parents and caregivers

- When asked to share about **their own past school experiences**, parents and caregivers shared a mix of positive and negative comments made.



Positive
26



Negative
52

Ways to increase connection between the School and Community:

Community Events

- Family night, breakfast, potluck.
- Events such as literacy night.
- Ceremonies, longhouse.

Invite Community in

- Elders for intergenerational knowledge.
- Retired educators to mentor new educators.
- Grandparents for literacy support.
- Youth committee.

Other

- Have a representative from the school at each community event.
- Create an inclusive School Advisory Committee.

Suggested Ways to Keep Families in the Know About School News:

Ways to communicate with families:

Town Hall for updates and to provide feedback

Inclusive parent/family advisory committees (PAC)

Updates through flyers, mail, app, information sessions

They noted that communication with home works the best when educators:



Communicate with caregivers regularly



Communicate areas of concern as soon as possible



Include students in planning and explain report cards



Include grandparents in educational planning



Support caregivers in knowing which questions to ask



Be mindful of caregiver suggestions

How Could Families Be More Connected With Our Schools?

Funds and resources for the parent advisory committee

Cultural parent group

Flexibility on how much involvement

Provide child-minding

Provide an honorarium, gift cards, food and other incentives

Find out what caregivers need

Barriers to Caregiver Involvement Were Identified:

Lack of funding and resources for Parent Advisory Committee

Parents and caregivers are very busy

Some parents work, lack transportation, or have negative memories

Public school website was difficult to navigate for report cards

Which Committees and Extra Curricular Groups Sᑭᓄᓄᓄᓄᓄᓄᓄ Schools Should Have:

Inclusive parent/family advisory group

Elders to mentor kids & youth

Student youth council

Post-secondary support

Academic curriculum

Volunteer reading group

Knowledge or Cultural Keepers

2SLGBTQ

Drumming and singing

Band

Academic & history club

Elders support for students

Canoe club

Committee to oversee teachings

Advocacy and support

Parent support

What Courses Would Help Build Life and Academic Skills?

Groups included:

Parents and caregivers | Youth (ages 13-18)

- The following courses were suggested by parents and caregivers, and youth (ages 13-18) to help build life and academic skills:



Sports & recreation



Outdoor education



Day-to-day life skills



Nutrition



Cooking



Home economics



Sewing



Financial literacy



Science



Art



Photography



Music



Woodwork



Metalwork

Report Cards and Family Relationship With School

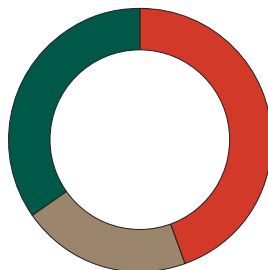
Groups included:

Elders and Knowledge Keepers | Parents and caregivers

- We asked families if the report card and parent-teacher interviews are currently working in public schools:



Yes
43



Unsure or
No Comment

6



No
24

Grading

- Want to go back to grading for clarity.
- Dislike grading due to pressure and impact on self esteem.
- Community should define success and grading system.
- Accommodations may be needed and should not be penalized.
- Challenge youth who are excelling in school.

Report Cards

- Make comments mandatory to help caregivers understand.
- Share specifics about education.
- Recognize different types of abilities.
- Reflect strengths, positive approach to areas for improvement.
- Some dislike putting kids in a box through report cards.

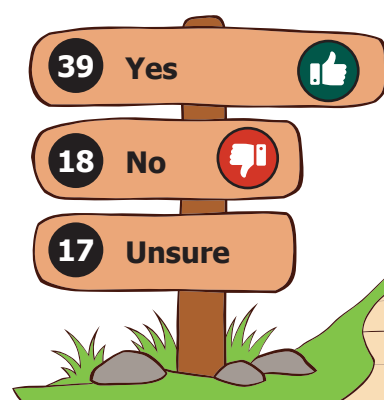
Parent Meetings

- Prefer parent-teacher interviews over student-led conferences.
- Prefer open house instead of interviews.
- Liked it when multiple educators working with the student attend the meeting.
- Would like to compare child progress over time.
- Understand that success can look many different ways.

Looking Ahead Together

- Parents and caregivers shared their thoughts on these important questions:

Are you open to redefining the school year?



Would you be interested in online classes?



Families Shared Their Thoughts on the Roles Schools and Families Play in Caring for Children:

Family Responsibility

Nurture success through care and guidance

Shared Responsibility

Support our mǎnǎm to discover their gifts

School Responsibility

Well-rounded teaching and create opportunities



Family

- Basic daily needs.
- Attendance.
- Academic support.
- Share teachings, values, and good ways of being.
- Good parenting.
- Engage with child.
- Give opportunities.
- Empower children.
- Treat children well.
- Connection to culture.
- Provide discipline & structure.

Shared

- Learning environment.
- Joint responsibility to support children.
- Work together.
- Share information/knowledge.
- Relationship.
- Support for behaviour and good ways of being.
- Culture and language.
- That teachings are connected.

School

- Relationships with parents and community.
- Culture and language.
- Good ways of being.
- Support student learning.
- Include all learners.
- Support wellbeing.
- Support parents.
- Quality teachers.
- Treat children well.
- Keep children safe.
- Teach practical skills.

Parents and Caregivers Perspectives on Inclusive Education

Groups included:

Elders and Knowledge Keepers | Parents and caregivers

- Inclusive education means all students learn together in the same classroom, with tailored support to their learning needs.
- Families shared their perspectives on what has worked:

Parents and Caregivers who have a child with extra learning needs

33

Yes

19

No

10

N/A



For those who require additional support, are their needs being met?

21

Yes

6

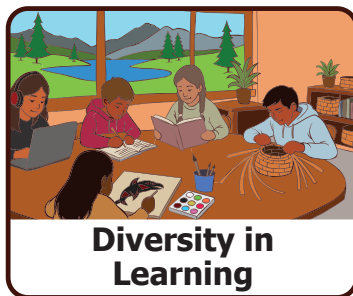
No

6

Unsure



Families Who Said They Were Caring for a Child With Additional Learning Needs Talked About:



Ways Inclusive Education Has Worked With Teachers:



Did not pressure them



Provided extra individual support



Hands-on teacher



Clear communication



Included everyone



Quietly taught them things



Calm and Forgiving

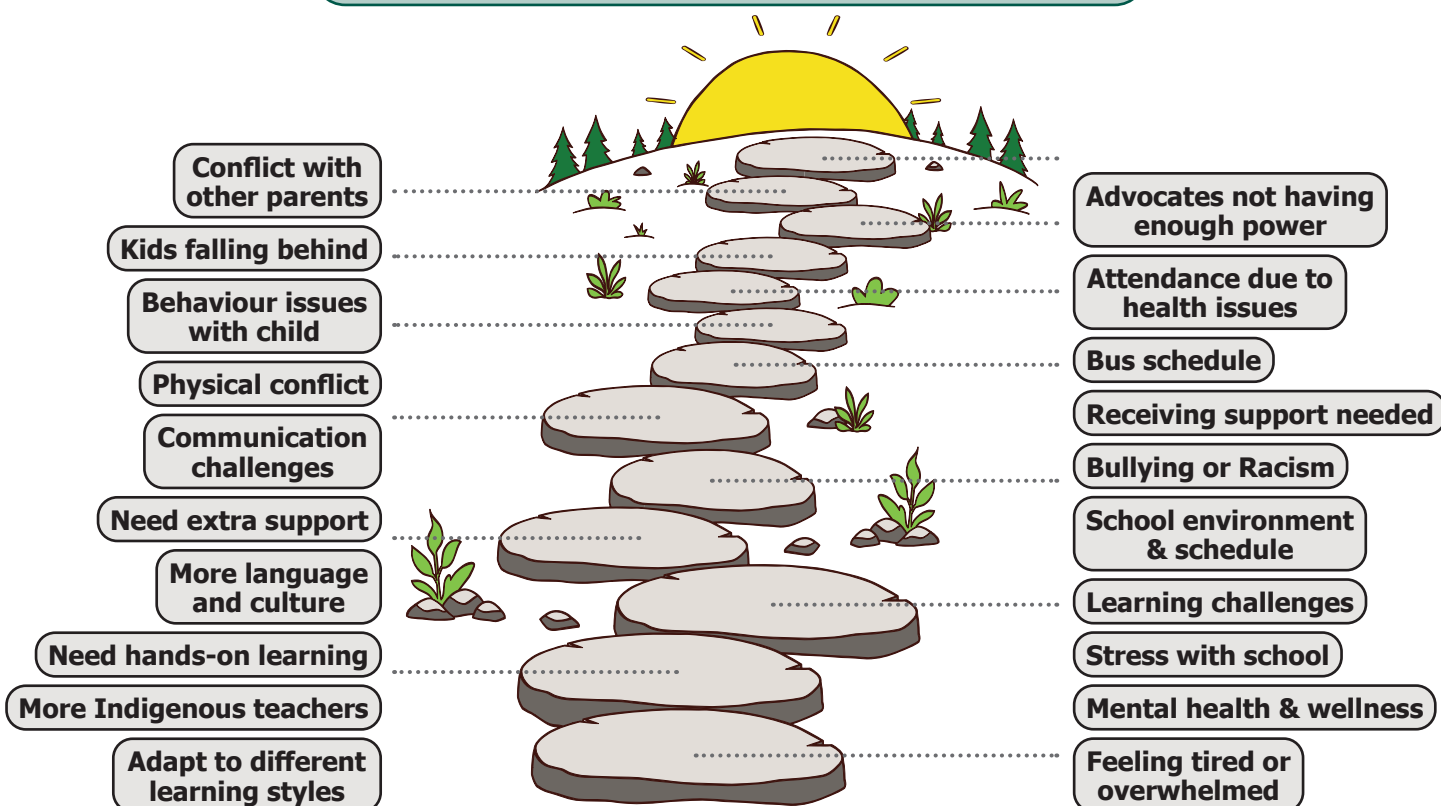
Challenges to Overcome

Groups included:

Parents and caregivers | Youth (ages 13-18) | Youth Conference | Children (ages 4-13)

- Families shared experiences that were hard in the past.
- By understanding what did not work, we can build a better education system together.

These challenges become stepping stones, and together we can create a path to overcome them.



How What We Heard Will Be Used & Next Steps

The Voices Shared in These 290 Interviews Represent the Knowledge, Experiences, Hopes, and Responsibilities of Our Community.

The findings from this report will be used to begin drafting the Education Law. The teachings, experiences, and aspirations shared through the interview process will help establish the foundation, principles, and direction of the law. As drafting progresses, the work will be brought back to our people for further review, discussion, and input. This next phase will ensure there are continued opportunities to shape and strengthen the law before it is finalized.

This work is part of an ongoing journey toward an education system grounded in our language, culture, teachings, and ways of knowing. The 290 interviews provide a strong foundation, but this is not the end of the conversation. Continued engagement with our people, families, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, educators, and youth will help ensure the Education Law reflects our collective vision for the future of our mé́nmen and generations yet to come.

A Timeline to the Referendum, in June 2027:



Get Involved

Whether you would like to sit down with us for a meal we provide or chat over the phone, we are eager to hear what will help the education of our mé́nmen thrive.

Please reach out to the s7ulh wa nexwniwéyalh (Our Ways of Education) team to set up a time to share your valuable knowledge and teachings.

Email: reclaiming.education@squamish.net

Phone: 604-982-7600 (ask to speak to the Our Ways of Education team)

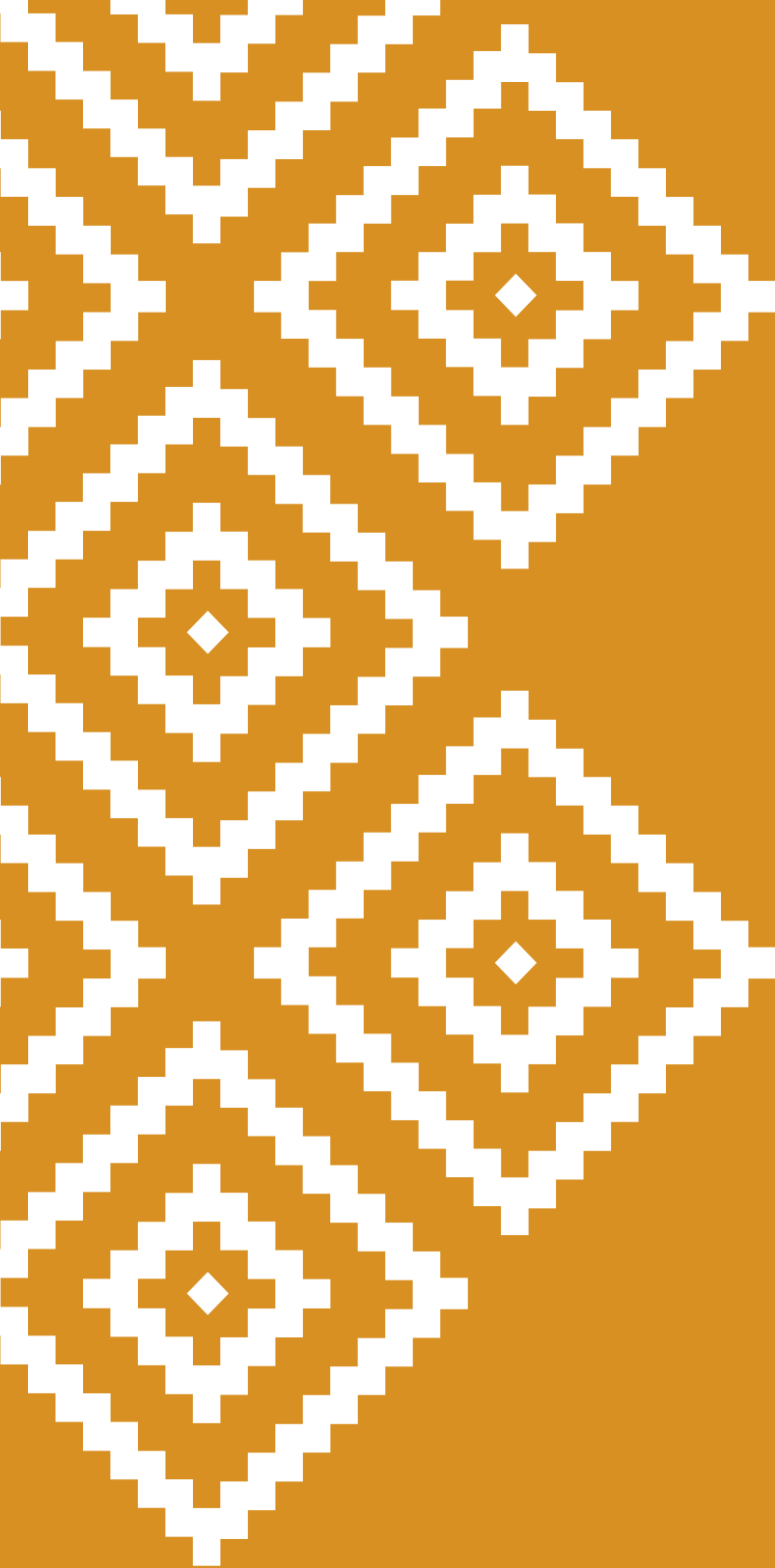
Together, we can create an Education Law that reflects who we are as Squamish people, honours the teachings of our ancestors, and supports our mé́nmen to thrive for generations to come.

Revisit the results of our General Community Survey, which had 551 responses in 2024:

bit.ly/OurWaysOfEducation_GeneralCommunitySurvey

Or scan the QR code:





s7ulh wa nexwniwéyah *Our Ways of Education*

Website: <https://www.squamish.net/community-initiatives/reclaiming-education>

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