

District Literacy Plan

2010 – 2011

“Literacy has the power to change people’s lives, forever, and for better.”

ReadNow BC

Introduction

The Government of British Columbia has introduced ReadNow BC, a literacy action plan to improve reading skills among its people. We are challenged to look for new ways to ensure students complete high school, preschool children have the skills they need to succeed in school and, adults and Aboriginal people improve their reading skills, including workplace literacy.

In response to this challenge, Boards of Education are required to prepare and submit to the Minister of Education a District Literacy Plan with respect to

improving the literacy of all citizens within the District. A District Literacy Plan is a statement of commitment by a school district to collaborate with key community stakeholders to strengthen literacy within the community.

Community Context

School District #60 serves the cities of Fort St. John, Taylor, and Hudson's Hope and surrounding rural communities. Fort St. John is located in the heart of the Peace River Valley. The population is now more than 18,000 people, comprised mostly of young families with children. The population represents the youngest median age (29.6 years) in the province after Whistler. Fort St. John is the largest regional service center in northeast B.C., servicing 64,000 in the city and outlying areas. Three industries employ the majority of people in Fort St. John; oil and gas, agriculture, and forestry. Service, retail, hospitality and construction are some of the robust industries and businesses thriving in the city.

Taylor is located on Mile 30 of the Alaska Highway, 18 km south of Fort St. John. It is home to 1,400 residents. Hudson's Hope is situated 90 km. west of Fort St. John and is a town of 1,200 people.

Fort St. John is a hub for the Northern B.C. Treaty 8 First Nations Communities. Three reserves are in the drawing area for School District #60; Blueberry River, Doig River, and Halfway River First Nations. First Nations students comprise 17% of the total population of School District #60.

There is a small but growing immigrant population in the area. Approximately 5% of students in our district speak English as a second language.

A more detailed review of community demographics can be found in the North Peace Regional Literacy Plan.

Community Connections

The North Peace Regional Literacy Task Force was established three years ago, with representatives from education, industry, government and non-profits. The task force was mobilized in recognition of the need to increase the literacy and numeracy skills of community members, as well as assist them in attaining their educational and career goals and increasing their quality of life. Focus groups were conducted with participation from task force members, service providers, employers, parents and interested individuals to identify literacy needs and to establish priorities for the region.

The Task Force developed the North Peace Regional Literacy Plan, which has two main goals for the past year;

1. Implement an Awareness Campaign to:
 - address the regional stigma and disregard towards literacy and/or increasing literacy skills.

- create a positive attitude shift towards supporting literacy.
 - increase regional knowledge of literacy services by potential clients, other service providers and the general public.
2. Hire a part time Community Literacy Outreach Coordinator to:
- update and maintain a database of organizations, businesses and community partners who support community literacy development
 - help coordinate literacy services and resources
 - facilitate a collaborative action plan to address gaps in services.

A new part time Community Literacy Outreach Coordinator (LOC) was hired in May, 2009. Throughout the 2009/2010 year, the LOC has worked to make connections within the business community, First Nations, and various round tables. Ongoing Public Service Announcements were made through a local radio station. Literacy blogs, a Twitter account and a Face Book group were also established to raise awareness of literacy. The website is regularly refreshed. The LOC updates the service directory and identifies a list of literacy friendly organizations to be maintained on the website. The LOC works closely with the school district and several community stakeholders to ensure the needs of the community are identified.

A senior administrator with School District #60 sits on the Steering Committee for the Literacy Task Force. The senior administrator attends regular meetings of the Literacy Task Force, acting as a liaison between community partners and the School District Board of Trustees. The District Literacy Plan is developed with input from the Literacy Task Force and is directly linked to the Regional Literacy Plan.

District and School Connections

The District Literacy Plan is linked closely to the Achievement Contract, the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement and the individual School Improvement Plans. Actions in the District Literacy Plan support selected goals and objectives in these other improvement documents. The District Literacy Plan is developed in conjunction with the Achievement Contract and follows the same Board approval process.

The S.D. #60 Literacy Rep Team brings a teacher from each of our schools together in a monthly meeting to discuss instructional practice and student achievement in literacy. Literacy Reps review and evaluate new learning resources, review the current professional literature, share examples of successful classroom instruction, and make recommendations for the structure and content of professional development opportunities. Literacy Reps bring information from the team meetings back to their school staffs and bring

questions or concerns from their school staffs forward to the district meetings. The Literacy Rep team also provides input to the District Literacy Plan.

The Ministry of Education requires that the District Literacy Plan report on progress toward four overall literacy goals.

These goals are to:

- increase the number of children entering school ready to succeed;
- increase the number of children in school who read successfully;
- increase the number of adults with the reading and literacy skills to function in everyday life and succeed in the workplace; and,
- increase the number of Aboriginal people who read successfully.

The plan has been developed around these four goals.

Early Learning

School District #60 believes in the importance of all children having equal access to experiences supporting early childhood development. This includes “encouragement and exposure to begin a lifelong love of reading” (ReadNow BC), not formal reading instruction delivered at an earlier age level. School district and collaborative community initiatives supporting early learning and literacy development have all focused on parent or caregiver participation. The idea is to inform the adults about early childhood development, model activities and share resources to enhance the likelihood that these adults will continue to involve young children in developmentally appropriate activities at home and have fun together in the process! Children who arrive at school having been read to using a wide variety of developmentally appropriate children’s literature, having been engaged in “book talk” and story telling activities, and having explored rhythm and rhyme in oral language are better equipped to experience success as emergent readers.

The school district partners with community organizations to fund a position for a Community Early Learning Coordinator. The CELC is a certified teacher and the school district acts as the steward for the position. The role of the CELC is to liaise with the school district and community organizations offering early learning/literacy services to preschool aged children and their families, and publish a monthly early learning event calendar. In addition, the CELC coordinates Mother Goose training and schedules program delivery, facilitates the Words On Wheels (WOW) bus outreach program, and supports the set up and ongoing operation of StrongStart centers.

The WOW bus has been on the road since July 2007, promoting family literacy and learning by bringing ideas, resources and goodwill into neighborhoods. Its popularity has grown steadily and it now serves seven rural communities, three First Nations reserves, and five outlying city neighborhoods at 28 different stops. Registration has remained steady this year, with close to 450 children (along with their families or caregivers) signing out backpacks containing a selection of

books and early learning activities.

Our first StrongStart center opened at Duncan Cran School in October, 2007, followed by Robert Ogilvie School in October, 2008. Both enjoy a steady stream of visitors, with over 400 children now officially registered. In September 2009, a third center opened in the community of Hudson's Hope, and a StrongStart Outreach Program began to serve four outlying rural communities via the WOW Bus.

Early learning actions and next steps are summarized in the following table.

ACTIONS	NEXT STEPS
1. Build on the success of the annual parent conference and Ready Set Learn events.	1. Work collaboratively with the ECD table to support the growing participation rates at the annual parent conference. Share agendas and events from the most successful Ready Set Learn events.
2. Implement recommendations from the WOW Bus Focus Group and review commissioned by independent researcher, Sylvia Vilches. Continue work to establish guest schedule and volunteer list	2. Review bus routes and stops on an ongoing basis to ensure maximum participation. Keep parent lending library current. Develop home-based activities to include in the child backpacks. Maintain volunteer list.
3. Extend Virtual StrongStart for an additional year of operation and work to build participation from around the province. Establish regular collaboration time for StrongStart facilitators.	3. Connect rural parents, who are not in favor of full day Kindergarten and choose to home school, with Virtual Strong Start.
4. Continue with collaborative work to open the new interactive play center, with an emphasis on infant and toddler development, at the Child Development Center September, 2010.	4. Invite the ECE at the interactive play center to collaborate with StrongStart facilitators.
5. Build connections between StrongStart facilitators and Kindergarten teachers.	5. Invite StrongStart facilitators to all workshops for Kindergarten teachers supporting the transition to Full Day Kindergarten programs and play

	based learning.
6. Initiate joint planning for ECE training workshops with representatives from the School District, Northern Lights College, and the ECD table.	6. Implement a school district sponsored summer institute on PALS, open to community ECEs.

K – 12 Literacy

SD #60 has a strong early literacy program at the Kindergarten/Grade 1 levels, which focuses on identifying students who may be encountering difficulty early on and providing intervention before they develop unproductive habits and negative self-esteem. Kindergarten students are screened in October and April, using a locally developed assessment tool for phonological processing ability. All Kindergarten teachers teach phonological processing using district approved instructional resources. Students who do not meet expectations on the April post-test are offered additional instruction. In Grade 1, students are screened using Marie Clay's Observation Survey. The weakest students are enrolled in Reading Recovery, where they receive daily one-on-one instruction in reading and writing with a specially trained teacher for up to 20 weeks.

Students in grades 1 – 7 participate in a district year-end reading assessment.

The percentage of students meeting or exceeding the target for their grade level is monitored at the school and district level. At schools characterized by weak cohort performance, follow up conversations take place to seek understanding. Is there additional performance data to confirm that students are struggling? What strategies may be employed to build student success? The district differentiates support and resources to the schools with the most challenging student populations. Schools, in turn, differentiate support and resources to the individual students with the greatest need.

District literacy initiatives have included a strong focus on non-fiction literacy learning. Current research indicates that boys prefer reading non-fiction titles.

The district believes that offering more instruction and resources in non-fiction, particularly to the boys in our classrooms, may increase engagement in the reading process and translate to improved reading achievement.

The school district promotes a developmental approach to acquiring literacy skill throughout the elementary and middle years. This means that students are assessed and instructed according to their individual needs. The use of technology as a tool for differentiation is encouraged and fostered in the Wireless Writing Project at the grades 6/7 levels.

Oral language joins reading and writing as one of the three pillars necessary in the development of literate learners. Oral language is a common thread throughout the language arts curriculum from Kindergarten to grade 12.

Strategies in the effective use of oral language in the classroom are modeled at all local in-services for classroom teachers. Classroom teachers are required to create opportunities for students to discuss their thinking. When students are involved in structured, animated conversations, they are able to contribute to the classroom community. Oral language development contributes to success in reading and writing.

English Language Arts instruction at the high school continues to evolve through the implementation of the time and support blocks and new locally developed courses. In order to accommodate students who require intervention to be successful in the regular high school English program, a new course called Learning Strategies for Literacy has been developed. Students practice strategies that provide a foundation for success while learning about multiple intelligences and who they are as a learner. Highly engaging, relevant text is used to motivate and engage these young adults.

The school district seeks to nurture cultures of collaborative practice, where teams of teachers make on-going adjustments to their teaching based on a process of inquiry. In such cultures, new teachers are welcomed and supported. Additionally, teachers exiting the system should have less impact on the culture of practice in the school. Effective instructional strategies and resources are shared. These cultures have the potential to both improve and sustain high levels of student achievement. To build instructional capacity at schools and support collaborative practice, teams of teachers are able to apply to the district for collaboration grants. Grants may be used for teacher-on-call time to release classroom teachers to collaboratively plan, debrief, or co-teach lessons. Literacy support teachers are available to help facilitate the work of collaborative teams as requested.

To help ensure that classroom teachers offer consistent and strong literacy instruction across the grades, literacy support teachers offer an on-going program of professional development. Workshops, demonstration classrooms, and coaching are available on balanced literacy, SMART Learning, 6+1 Traits of Writing, Wireless Writing, and Literature Circles.

Actions and next steps for improving the literacy skills of school-aged children are summarized in the following table:

ACTIONS	NEXT STEPS
1. Continue to offer early identification and intervention for at-risk readers at the early primary levels.	1. Ensure that all schools have the necessary training and resources, Identify school sites experiencing success and share good practice.
2. Continue to differentiate district	2. Help schools to build

support and resources to schools with cohorts of the most challenging to teach students	instructional capacity through facilitated collaboration time.
3. Provide training for all classroom teachers, grades 3 – 7, on the new district reading assessment. Anchor the assessment through a collaborative marking process to ensure that all teachers are using rubrics reliably.	3. Expand use of the new district reading assessment to grades 8 & 9 using the same training process.
4. Provide a varied program of professional development on effective literacy instruction including workshops, demonstration classrooms, coaching, and facilitated collaboration time with teacher teams. Teach elements of formative assessment explicitly in all literacy workshops, offer follow-up support to all workshops to ensure transfer of training to the classroom.	4. Build in the teaching of elements of differentiated instruction and Universal Designs for Learning (UDL) explicitly in all literacy workshops.

Evidence and targets for improving the literacy performance of school-aged children are detailed in the District Achievement Contract.

Adult Literacy

The three action items for adult literacy in the 2008/2009 District Literacy Plan all took place and continue to be supported in the community. Community Futures, through funding from HRSDC, has implemented several workplace literacy initiatives along with Northern Lights College Workplace Essential Skills Training. Through the partnerships from the North Peace Literacy Alliance, the Task Force, and the school district, exploration into serving the needs of adult learners continues.

The Literacy Outreach Coordinator facilitated a meeting with community stakeholders to discuss the District Literacy Plan with a focus on the adult component. Participants were asked to be prepared to answer three questions:

1. Is literacy an issue for adults in the community? Why or why not?
2. What are the three biggest challenges to engaging adult learners in the community?
3. What might the community do to assist with the challenges?

Both clients and stakeholders were invited to attend the meeting, however no

clients attended. Stakeholders were also asked to engage their clients in the discussion and bring their feedback. Some knowledge gaps were identified. Service providers do not know about other programs and services available. Clients do not know the range of services available and their perspective is missing from the literacy conversations.

The LOC will continue to create awareness about literacy through presentations, blogs, face book, twitter and attending various round table meetings and literacy functions. A research project will be initiated to determine what motivates clients to seek services, why they exit programs, what they need to stay in programs, and what supports they need when their programs are complete. As well, service providers will be encouraged to use entrance and exit interviews with clients.

Actions and next steps for improving adult literacy skills are summarized in the following table:

ACTIONS	NEXT STEPS
1. Support the community awareness campaign on workplace literacy skills, and the work of the Literacy Outreach Coordinator to build relationships and communicate literacy initiatives.	1. Work with community partners, local businesses and organizations to develop training opportunities for workplace literacy skills.
2. Develop an understanding of the adult client's point of view, motivations and needs regarding literacy services in the community.	2. Support the Literacy Outreach Coordinator in conducting a research project engaging community members accessing existing services for improving their literacy skills.
3. Continue to offer professional development on formative assessment and reading strategies for the content areas to our trades training instructors.	3. Extend this professional development to the trades training instructors working in the college setting through a program of shared services developed in collaboration with NLC.
4. Explore ways to serve adult continuing education students in school district programs.	4. Establish a committee and work with our adult education partners to determine needs and make recommendations.

Aboriginal Literacy

We are concerned that many of our Aboriginal students do not enjoy the same level of success in school programs as their non-Aboriginal peers. There are a disproportionate number of Aboriginal students in special education categories.

While our Aboriginal students typically perform above the Provincial level for the Aboriginal sub-group on Ministry of Education measures of academic achievement (Foundation Skills Assessment and Provincial Final Exams), there is still room for improvement.

We monitor Aboriginal student performance when reviewing district achievement data in all academic areas, including literacy. Evidence and performance targets for literacy are detailed in the Achievement Contract. We are pleased to see a very positive trend developing in improved Aboriginal student performance on the district year-end reading assessment at the grades 3-7 levels. We are now extending the district year-end reading assessment to grades 8 & 9 to further monitor progress and ensure that gains are maintained.

We work very closely with our First Nations Education Program staff when developing intervention plans to support literacy development. First Nations Education Program staff is represented on our District Literacy Rep Team. We continue to work collaboratively to implement early reading intervention programs, introduce the use of literacy manipulatives in primary classrooms, and to infuse culturally relevant reading materials in all elementary school bookrooms. Our Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement is now officially signed off and we are been working toward the objectives listed in the agreement specifically addressing literacy achievement of our Aboriginal learners.

We received an Industry Training Authority grant to increase Aboriginal enrolment in Secondary Apprenticeship Programs. An important part of this goal is to build in support for the development of literacy skills in order to ensure success in the program.

We have a committee of educators working to review data on secondary student attendance and school withdrawal. We are looking at information from exit interviews to better understand factors that might contribute to keeping students in school, particularly with our Aboriginal students. We are looking at designing a different kind of alternate program that might better meet the needs of these students. A critical component of any such program will be literacy development.

Actions and next steps for improving Aboriginal literacy are summarized in the following table:

ACTIONS	NEXT STEPS
1. Follow the objectives and implement the strategies for improving the literacy achievement of all Aboriginal learners as listed in the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement.	2. Meet regularly with First Nations Education Program staff to prioritize collaborative actions and monitor outcomes.
2. Work with the Strong Start and WOW bus programs to include resources appropriate for Aboriginal students and their families.	2. First Nations Education Program staff meet with the Community Early Learning Coordinator (CELC) and StrongStart facilitators to ensure Aboriginal content when ordering new reading and early learning resources and liaise with the CELC to develop the WOW bus program for the First Nations reserve sites.
3. Offer community training for Aboriginal PALS at the school district summer institute, open to community ECEs.	3. Work with the First Nations Education Program staff to ensure that the Aboriginal PALS resource includes material that represents our local cultures.
4. Collaborate with Aboriginal Education Program staff to determine strategies for increasing Aboriginal student enrolment in Secondary Apprenticeship Programs.	4. Include plans for addressing literacy development in this initiative .

Conclusion

Through sharing the good work already in place, and building and extending community partnerships, we believe we can positively impact literacy levels and contribute to the health and wellbeing of our citizens.