

# Supporting Aboriginal Learners: Action Research in BC Public Schools



British Columbia  
School Trustees Association

**T**HE following is a brief overview of some of the action research projects and innovative programs Aboriginal students participate in across the province. This list was compiled using information from the 2006 School Recognition Awards (Aboriginal Learners category) organized by the School Leadership Centre at UBC. Many thanks to the centre's director, John Moss, for letting us use this information. More information on the School Leadership Centre is available at <http://slc.educ.ubc.ca>

## **A.D. RUNDLE MIDDLE SCHOOL** School District 33 (Chilliwack) *30% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Fast Track Reading Class  
Intervention to Improve Academic Success in  
All Areas

**Contact:** [Karen\\_agnew@sd33.bc.ca](mailto:Karen_agnew@sd33.bc.ca)

The Fast Track Reading Class helps students improve their decoding skills, reading fluency, and reading comprehension levels. The purpose of the Fast Track Reading Class is to increase students' reading abilities so that they can experience greater academic success.

Students are assessed and an individualized program is designed that meets their learning needs. A typical class starts with 30 minutes of silent reading of levelled novels, with each student reading at their own level. After silent reading there are 10 minutes of reading fluency practice with a partner. Reading fluency is followed by a word work lesson. The last 30 minutes focus on reading comprehension.

Currently, two classes run during the whole year for Grade 7 students. A three month program is available for students in Grades 8 and 9.

## **BAYVIEW ELEMENTARY** School District 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) *56% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** JUMP Math – Intensive Support  
Program for Math

**Contact:** [dgoodman@sd68.bc.ca](mailto:dgoodman@sd68.bc.ca)

Project data collection is still ongoing.

## **CACHE CREEK ELEMENTARY** School District 74 (Gold Trail) *50% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Improve Reading Comprehension  
for All with a Particular Focus on Boys

**Contact:** [doconnor@gw.sd74.bc.ca](mailto:doconnor@gw.sd74.bc.ca)

The purpose of this project is to improve reading comprehension for students, with a particular focus on boys.

By providing appropriate, appealing texts and following a Guided Reading framework, the program teaches comprehension strategies that result in improved literacy. The project's focus is on boys in Grades 2 to 7. Teachers and the literacy teacher collaborate to plan 1

and implement the project, using books and reading materials that are relevant and of interest to boys.

Current research indicates that boys respond to particular kinds of reading material (Moloney, 2002) such as:

- non fiction books
- books that reflect their image of themselves
- books that make them laugh and appeal to their sense of mischief
- fiction that focuses on action more than emotion

**DEWDNEY ELEMENTARY**  
 School District 75 (Mission)  
*11% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Use of Writing Performance Standards and Peer Evaluations to Improve Writing Skills

**Contact:** larry.jepsen@sd75.mission.bc.ca

Students use the Performance Standards scales written in student-friendly language to critique their peers' work and improve their own writing.

**JOHN FIELD ELEMENTARY**  
 School District 82 (Coast Mountains)  
*84% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Creation of a Gitxsan Language Resource for an Endangered First Nations Language

**Contact:** vsutherland@cmsd.bc.ca

The Gitxsan Language is one of the endangered First Nations Languages in Canada. Dr. Jane Smith spearheaded a project to create a Gitxsan Language Resource that consists of a series of Primary Gitxsan Language Songs, Illustrated Song cards, a CD and teachers' resource book.

The CDs include 14 read-a-long songs to improve pronunciation of those not fluent in Gitxsanimx. The songs cover popular themes and use simple language and repetition to reinforce the language, with vocabulary appropriate for the primary age group.

**GLENVIEW ELEMENTARY 1**  
 School District 57 (Prince George)  
*15% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Improve Reading Using Mosaic of Thought Strategies and Red Cedar Book Club

**Contact:** gwalraven@sd57.bc.ca

The school's project has three components: one for teachers, parents and students. Teachers observe each

other's classrooms and watch others use strategies from Mosaic of Thought. Parents are taught how to use strategies from Mosaic of Thought and students read, share books and take part in the Red Cedar Book Awards.

**HOUSTON SECONDARY**  
 School District 54 (Bulkley Valley)  
*21% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Reading Teaching and Assessment Strategies Using Accelerated Reading and Reading 44

**Contact:** byoung@sd54.bc.ca

This project is constructed of several components, which include:

- a. Release time for teachers to work with the Literacy Coordinator in planning for and then debriefing modelled teaching and assessment strategies.
- b. Increasing collection of Accelerated Reading materials.
- c. Release time for teachers and teacher-librarian to work together on units of instruction and strategies that promote and improve reading.
- d. Work with parents in promoting reading at home and helping students to make informed decisions about future courses and post-secondary institutions.

The project's purpose and objectives include the following:

- a. Building teachers' capacity and increasing their repertoire of effective teaching strategies, including Reading 44 strategies, in order to improve student achievement in reading and writing.
- b. Continuing the implementation of Accelerated Reader and whole school silent reading.
- c. Improving student achievement in reading and writing as identified by Grade 10 and 12 government exams, Demand Write results in Grade 9 and success rates in English and Humanities courses.
- d. Increasing the participation rate of students in English 12

- e. Increasing student achievement as indicated by Star Reading of the Accelerated Reading Program and by the D.A.R.T. assessment.

**LAKE KATHLYN ELEMENTARY**

School District 54 (Bulkley Valley)

*35% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Action Research, Dialogue and Collaboration to Support Vulnerable Students

**Contact:** pdubar@sd54.bc.ca

The focus of this project is to improve learning for vulnerable students who do not yet or minimally meet the expectations for reading at their grade level. More action research and shared decision-making are encouraged in order to develop a coordinated strategy or systematic approach in responding when students are not learning at the expected rate.

The project provides opportunities for teachers to focus on learning and improving their practice by allowing them the time for action research, dialogue, communication and collaboration around data, assessment, evaluation, resources, teaching methods and general professional development. Teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate in projects, attend workshops together or study learning support structures at other schools.

**KHOWHEMUN ELEMENTARY**

School District 79 (Cowichan Valley)

*40% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Individualization and Differentiation Through Multiple Intelligences to Improve Reading Success for all students

**Contact:** ccoleman@sd79.bc.ca

The purpose and objectives of the school program are to improve academic performance in reading. The goal is to improve reading success for all students. Based on this action research model, the objectives are to:

1. Enhance reading instruction, intervention and enrichment for all students
2. Increase the use of teaching strategies that match students' multiple intelligences and learning styles
3. Track individual student progress and adapt to individual needs.
4. Teachers will increase the use of strategies for multiple intelligences to meet the diverse needs of students.

**LYTTON ELEMENTARY**

School District 74 (Gold Trail)

*85% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Improve Readings Skills through a Home Reading Program

**Contact:** greilly@gw.sd74.bc.ca

The focus of this project is the development of a home reading program. Firstly, the program would aim to promote literacy by providing students with books that can be read at home with their parents.

Secondly, the program would develop students' reading skills, as they will be reading books at their instructional level at home with parents helping.

Thirdly, the home reading program would be an avenue for improving communication between the school and the home.

Through the school's homework program, teachers will communicate excellent reading strategies to parents that will enable them to help develop their child's reading skills.

**MERRITT CENTRAL ELEMENTARY**

School District 58 (Nicolas-Similkameen)

*51% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Improve Reading and Social Responsibility Through Integrated Approach

**Contact:** sfukushi@sd58.bc.ca

The program's goal is to set in place an integrated plan that would further improve reading and social responsibility learning through an integrated approach with home, with instructional improvement, and with curriculum.

Some of the projects undertaken include providing workshops for parents on how to support their children's reading at home, and teaching primary children how to deal with conflict through the use of the W.I.T.S. (Walk away, Ignore, Talk about it, and Seek help) program.

**MERRITT SECONDARY**

School District 58 (Nicolas-Similkameen)

*40% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Noon Hour Tutorial with Aboriginal Teacher and Student Assistants with Academic Coursework

**Contact:** voflaherty@sd58.bc.ca

The focus of the tutorial is on helping students, in particular Aboriginal students, with their academic

course work. Students are provided with a small nutritious lunch as well as an inviting place to receive teacher assistance with their work.

Student tutorial assistants work as role models and mentors to students. These students are currently in Grades 11 and 12 and have committed to work with other students in the tutorials providing academic help.

**M.V. BEATTIE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
 School District 83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap)  
 22% Aboriginal Learners

**Project Summary:** Promoting Academic and Social Success using Schoolwide Writes, Math Success Club, PALS, First Nations Educational Dinners and Positive Behaviour System  
**Contact:** mvb@sd83.bc.ca

The school’s initiatives include working on four school wide writes (using performance standards as yardstick), a math success club to assist students in learning their basic facts, Parents as Learning Supporters Program (PALS), and three First Nations educational dinners held throughout the year.

Socially, the school is building a Positive Behaviour System (PBS) program and increasingly using Restitution as a model to strengthen students.

**QUAMICHAN MIDDLE SCHOOL**  
 School District 79 (Cowichan Valley)  
 27% Aboriginal Learners

**Project Summary:** Focus on All Students Working at Grade Level through Middle School Model and Cultural Identity Strategies for First Nations learners  
**Contact:** tzinkan@sd79.bc.ca

Several issues were addressed to improve First Nations learning at this school. Some of the problems at the school were:

1. The Native Transition classes were no longer operating at a core level.
2. They had become a dumping ground. As a result, most of the First Nations students were in the SDC or Native Transition classes, creating a segregated environment.
3. Many of the students were reading well below grade level.
4. A double standard existed between our First Nations students and the rest of the students, in behaviour and academic achievement.

5. Many capable children were disengaged and working below grade level.
6. Excellence was nowhere to be seen in the school culture. There was no history on the walls, no displays of students’ work, no statements of who they were or what they stood for.
7. There was not a strong connection to the community, particularly the First Nations community.

Some of the changes made include:

1. A vision was radiated that all students at Quamichan would be working at grade level.
2. A middle school model was implemented incorporating team teaching, common preps for team teachers, and advisories.
3. SDC and Native Transition classes were eliminated and all students integrated back into the regular classroom.
4. Support teacher in the room at each grade level. The role of the support teacher is to help teachers develop units of study at the students’ instructional level, to help students grasp new concepts, to support them in completing their work and help build their self-esteem.
5. Working with Cowichan Tribes and the French Department, the school implemented Hul’q’umi’num’ and cultural studies in Grades 7, 8 and 9.
6. Embracing the philosophy “that it takes a community to educate a child,” the school has empowered the PAC, and First Nations community to become active partners.
7. The school is decorated with art and student work that promotes a culture of inclusion, excellence and “unbreakable spirit.”

**ROSEDALE ELEMENTARY**  
 School District 33 (Chilliwack)  
 16% Aboriginal Learners  
**Project Summary:** Read to Succeed Program for All Students  
**Contact:** nadine\_clattenburg@sd33.bc.ca

“Read to Succeed” is a pilot Direct Instruction literacy project incorporating a controlled research 4

study, a high degree of accountability based on student data, broad stakeholder involvement, and commitment to sharing results. Every one of the the students is involved in our project.

Mastery is documented at each small step so that no child is left behind. The project uses data to provide differentiated instruction using Language for Learning (K-1), Reading Mastery (K-6), Corrective Reading (4-12, remedial), Horizons C/D, Skills for School Success, and Open Court. Read to Succeed uses phonemic awareness instruction, phonics instruction, vocabulary development, and fluency, as well as systematic, intensive, sequential instruction tailored to meet individual needs.

**SALMON ARM WEST ELEMENTARY**  
 School District 83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap)  
*34% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** PALS: Parents as Literary Support ers and POPS: Parents of Primary Students  
**Contact:** jaitken@sd83.bc.ca

This school recognition project is still underway.

**TAHAYGHEN ELEMENTARY**  
 School District 50 (Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte)  
*72% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Community, Land and Culture  
**Contact:** ckestle@sd50.bc.ca

This school recognition project is still underway.

**TATLA LAKE ELEMENTARY/JUNIOR SECONDARY**  
 School District 27 (Caribbo-Chilcotin)  
*15% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Family Stories Literacy Project  
**Contact:** Michael.grace@sd27.bc.ca

Project Purpose: Tatla Lake has a diverse representation of families: ranchers, small business, tourism, First Nations, long-term residents and newcomers. Each has fascinating stories to tell. Recording stories provides “real life” relevancy and involvement in literacy (writing, reading). Sharing personal stories strengthens the community by expanding knowledge of others in the community. Sharing stories bridges cultural and generational divides.

Project Objectives: To increase home/school/community partnerships in support of literacy for the students of Tatla Lake Elementary/Junior/Secondary School.

Literacy includes reading, writing, information literacy, computer literacy and media literacy.

**TSI DELDEI SCHOOL**  
 Independent  
*39% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Positive School Environment Project with Teaching of Virtues and Social Skills  
**Contact:** jhorsman@bc.firstnationschools.ca

Tsi Deldel School is located in a small, remote First Nations community. The school’s project, Positive School Environment, is a combination of philosophy, practices, and procedures. Using research-supported curricula, effective behaviour programs, and relevant philosophies of education pedagogy and psychology, the school has crafted an holistic environment.

One component of the program is that of a strong teaching and support staff through mentoring, coaching, and collaboration.

Another part of the school program is the explicit teaching of virtues and social skills on a school-wide basis. Each month the school works on a virtue and social skill. These virtues and social skills were developed collaboratively between community leaders, parents, community members.

**TUC EL NUIT ELEMENTARY**  
 School District 53 (Okanagan Similkameen)  
*20% Aboriginal Learners*

**Project Summary:** Support for Reading Comprehension for Aboriginal Students  
**Contact:** jkennedy@sd53.bc.ca

Some of the program’s goals include:

- Continue improving reading comprehension specifically for Aboriginal students.
- To run Year Three of the school’s reading program for identified Aboriginal students to be held twice weekly, after school and in the evenings.
- To improve Aboriginal students’ guided reading levels, improve school-based reading comprehension results and the FSA results for Grades 4 and 7.
- FSA results in reading comprehension for Grade 4 students and grade 7 students will improve by five per cent.

- School-based reading comprehension assessment will show a five per cent improvement in Aboriginal students meeting expectations in reading using the Performance Standards in Grades 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.
- Aboriginal homes will have a designated study area with books, library cards, etc.
- In the next four to five years, more Aboriginal students will be graduating from high school.

**TWAIN ELEMENTARY**

School District 54 (Bulkley Valley)  
14% Aboriginal Learners

**Project Summary:** Collaboration and Learner Support for Numeracy and Literacy  
**Contact:** byoung@sd54.bc.ca

The components of this project include:

- Release time for teachers to plan-model-debrief teaching and assessment strategies with a Math Support Teacher.
- Implementation of the PALS program and Talking Tables program in kindergarten.
- Planning for early intervention and improving our Learner Support model.
- Release time for teachers to visit other classrooms in the school and/or district to coach one another in the implementation of guided reading.
- Release time for teachers to collaborate in order to improve their Language Arts and Math instruction.
- Collaboration time to look at assessment and plan for instruction around the assessment in both literacy and numeracy.
- Some resources for literacy and numeracy that will improve the success of all students.

**UCLUELET ELEMENTARY**

School District 70 (Alberni)  
35% Aboriginal Learners

**Project Summary:** Math Makes Sense  
**Contact:** jcoltman@sd70.bc.ca

This school recognition project is still underway

**UCLUELET SECONDARY**

School District 70 (Alberni)  
42% Aboriginal Learners

**Project Summary:** Improving Student Writing Skills with Criterion Writing Assessment Tool and Student Feedback

**Contact:** jhitchings@sd70.bc.ca

In addition to using performance standards to monitor student writing skills and provide student feedback, this project provided students with ongoing and timely feedback with specific suggestions to improve writing skills. Students and teachers access the Criterion Writing Assessment tool to support and enhance student writing skills. This instructional tool provided students and instructors with an immediate analysis of student writing strengths and areas for improvement.

Analysis of classroom results allowed teachers to identify specific instructional interventions appropriate to individual learners.

**WHITEVALE ELEMENTARY**

School District 22 (Vernon)  
13% Aboriginal Learners

**Project Summary:** Develop a Levelled Text Resource to Meet Literacy Needs of All Students

**Contact:** csiegmuller@sd22.bc.ca

Teachers in Grades 1-6 teach reading by accessing books that are levelled for specific student needs. Building a school resource to address the variety of reading levels is a major commitment.

This involves the purchase of sets of six books that are specifically written and levelled for guided reading instruction. Those who will benefit the most from this are the students.

With the availability and choice of “just right” books that match student interests, teachers are able to prepare engaging lessons.

**WICKANINNISH COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

School District 70 (Alberni)  
52% Aboriginal Learners

**Project Summary:** Creation of Classroom Libraries and Use of Reading Strategies and Performance Standards

**Contact:** bdusseault@sd70.bc.ca

Classroom libraries were provided with new reading materials and in three classrooms entire

class libraries were created. In-school professional development planning and implementation time was provided to create consistent language and understanding of reading strategies and familiarity with using Performance Standards, running records, and other assessment practices.