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NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

DISTRICT SIGNS THIRD ABORIGINAL EDUCATION AGREEMENT

PITT MEADOWS - Representatives from the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows' school district, Ministry of Education and local Aboriginal communities signed their third Aboriginal education enhancement agreement today, in Swan-e-set Longhouse on the traditional territory of the Katzie First Nation.

"Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows is the first school district in British Columbia to sign their third Aboriginal education enhancement agreement," said Marc Dalton, MLA for Maple Ridge-Mission. "As a former school teacher with Métis heritage, I know this will greatly benefit Aboriginal children and communities at large."

"Aboriginal education enhancement agreements are an important part of our plan to improve aboriginal student achievement," said Education Minister Margaret MacDiarmid. "By working with Aboriginal communities to develop strategies and curriculum, we're helping ensure that each child has the best chance to succeed and develop skills to reach their full potential."

The ceremony was emblematic of the remarkable partnership between local First Nations and the school district. The agreement was carried into the Longhouse with a six-panelled wood carving entitled "Spirit of Our Children", created by more than 650 Aboriginal students from across the school district.

"The collaborative efforts of the school district, Aboriginal communities, students and parents will mean more opportunities for student success," said school district superintendent Jan Unwin. "Agreements like this help focus the commitment and resources necessary to improve school outcomes for Aboriginal students."

The Province is investing \$53.6 million a year, or about \$1,015 per student, for Aboriginal education in 2009-10. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and culture programs, Aboriginal support service programs and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

Aboriginal education enhancement agreements support the integration of Aboriginal culture in public schools, and Aboriginal communities are involved in the design of programs, services and curriculum delivery aimed at improving Aboriginal student achievement.

"This agreement builds on the framework for increased understanding and respect of Aboriginal peoples, their cultures and history," said Doug Hoey, principal of Aboriginal Education for school district 42. "Our third enhancement agreement will improve literacy and numeracy for over 1,000 Aboriginal students, and initiatives like the My Story Program allow all students to expand on their oral language communication and tradition while learning more about Aboriginal culture."

This third agreement is the result of ongoing engagement by members of the Aboriginal community and SD 42 where the Aboriginal student population has increased every year, and is experiencing a greater representation of Aboriginal students, parents and Aboriginal community agencies and networks.

"We are very excited to have our third Aboriginal education enhancement agreement in place," said Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows board of education chair Ken Clarkson. "Our Aboriginal student population has been increasing over the years, and it is more important than ever that we continue to build on facilitating excellence for all our Aboriginal learners in all grade levels."

Local Aboriginal groups, the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows school district and the ministry worked closely to develop strategies, objectives and goals to help improve Aboriginal student success. The district's Aboriginal education advisory committee meets three times each school year to evaluate performance data and review the agreement. The two main goals of the agreement, which will

be integrated into the district achievement contract as well as into each school's growth plan, are:

- \* To improve Aboriginal student success.
- \* To improve Aboriginal students' sense of belonging.

School districts report encouraging results following the signing of an Aboriginal education enhancement agreement. Completion rates for Aboriginal students in the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows school district increased by more than seven per cent since their first agreement in 2004.

To date, 48 B.C. school districts have signed Aboriginal education enhancement agreements. These agreements support the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda to build new relationships with Aboriginal peoples, as well as help schools meet the needs of Aboriginal students. Aboriginal education enhancement agreements are just one component of the collaborative process that the Province is undertaking to improve Aboriginal student achievement. Others include the B.C. First Nation Education Agreement and developing Aboriginal content for the K-12 curriculum.

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