

NEWS RELEASE
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Ministry of Education

Partnership supports Aboriginal learners in SE Kootenay

JAFFRAY - Education partners in Southeast Kootenay are renewing their support for Aboriginal learners by signing a second Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement focusing on improving the achievement of all Aboriginal learners and bringing the rich culture and history of First Nations into the classroom.

As a result of the first Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement the district now offers a wide range of Aboriginal-themed workshops including drumming, mask-making and storytelling, and an Elders-in residence program at Mount Baker Secondary aimed at increasing the sense of belonging for Aboriginal students.

During the first agreement, the Elders hosted an evening for the teaching staff of Mt. Baker and district staff at St. Eugene Mission near Cranbrook. This was the site of a former residential school and has been converted into a hotel/casino/golf course resort. The purpose of this evening was to tell their experiences as children who attended that school. This highly emotional evening helped school staff to understand what happened and how it still affects students two generations later.

New in this second agreement is the addition of the College of the Rockies as a partner. The College of the Rockies has been added to support the transition of Aboriginal students to post-secondary educational opportunities. Other partners include the school district, the Ktunaxa Nation (as represented by St. Mary's and Tobacco Plains communities), Métis Nation (as represented by Kootenay Region President's Council), and the Ministry of Education.

Quotes:

Kootenay East MLA Bill Bennett:

"My thanks to all partners for their hard work in support of Aboriginal learners and for bringing the rich First Nations culture and history into our classrooms to enrich the experience of every student."

Enhancement Agreement Facilitator Joe Pierre:

"While there is still much work to be done, there are very encouraging signs that levels of Aboriginal student achievement and engagement are improving. Perhaps more importantly, Aboriginal students are telling us that they are feeling welcomed and valued in our schools."

Background:

Nearly 13 per cent of Southeast Kootenay students are Aboriginal.

Since the first agreement was signed in 2005, Grade 4 Foundation Skills Assessment results show that Aboriginal students are now performing at a similar level to non-Aboriginal students in reading and numeracy.

To date, 51 school districts have signed Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements. A number of districts have signed their second agreement. Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows, Campbell River and Kamloops/Thompson have each signed their third agreement.

The six-year completion rate (students who graduate within six years of enrolling in Grade 8) for Aboriginal students in Southeast Kootenay for 2009/10 was 67 per cent; the provincial average for Aboriginal completion was 50 per cent.

Provincial funding for Aboriginal education in 2010/11 will be \$61.5 million (\$1,160 per student).

Learn More:

* Southeast Kootenay school district: <http://www.sd5.bc.ca/>

* B.C.'s Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements:
<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/agreements/>

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