



# Enhancing Student Learning Report

September 2024

In Review of the Board's Strategic Plan – Engage, Ignite, Empower 2022-2027



Approved by Coast Mountains School District  
Board of Education – October 23, 2024

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## Section B: Moving Forward

### *Planning and Adjusting for Continuous Improvement*

#### Introduction: District Context

Coast Mountains School District lies on the ancestral, traditional and unceded territories of the Gitxsan, Haisla, Nisga'a and Ts'msyen Nations. The school district employs close to 800 people who are in service to 4,300 learners attending 19 schools across the main communities of the Hazeltons, Kitimat, Kitwanga, Stewart, Terrace and Thornhill.

Through its mission, Coast Mountains School District is committed to supporting all learners in achieving their full potential while aspiring a passion for lifelong learning. We value learner engagement, culture, diversity, relationships, equity, and well-being and are growing our capacity around these daily. With learners at the centre, our district is focused on improving the quality of our programming and supports while honouring and respecting culture, diversity, and inclusion. This includes a commitment to developing and delivering culturally responsive and respectful learning experiences and environments.

Approximately 50% of the learners in Coast Mountains School District are of Indigenous ancestry. The school district works in partnership with 10 local First Nations. They are:

- Gitanmaax First Nation
- Gitanyow First Nation
- Gitsegukla First Nation
- Gitwangak First Nation
- Hagwilget First Nation
- Haisla First Nation
- Anspayaxw First Nation (Kispiox)
- Kitselas First Nation
- Kitsumkalum First Nation
- Sik-e-Dakh First Nation (Glen Vowell)

In the year ahead, Coast Mountains School District anticipates the development of new Local Education Agreements (LEA) as we work alongside the local Nations to best meet the learning and well-being needs of Indigenous learners from the ten communities. As well, the school district's partnerships with Metis Nation of British Columbia (MNBC) and Kermode Friendship Society, serve and support a large urban Indigenous population particularly in the communities of Terrace and Kitimat.

Coast Mountains understands its responsibility for sustained and ongoing action that will contribute to the healing that must occur between non-Indigenous people who are guests on the unceded territories of the Gitxsan, Haisla, Nisga'a and Ts'msyen Nations as well as fostering better relationships with the diverse Indigenous Peoples who are represented in Terrace and Kitimat. Part of this commitment is to ensure that we engage with all rightsholders to ensure their voice is centered in this work.

We are enhancing how local First Nations ways of knowing and being, knowledge systems, culture, language, and history support a pathway to Reconciliation and contributes to every student's learning. Doing this in an intentional way will mean investing in the time and resources dedicated to ongoing learning so we build capacity across the system. Nurturing and fostering positive personal and cultural identity is essential for all learners, and through each student's knowing the story of who they are, will contribute to appreciating and valuing the diverse stories of others.

Not unlike other rural and remote school districts in British Columbia, Coast Mountains has experienced significant staffing challenges in recent years. By the end of the 2023-2024 school year, approximately 10% of the district's enrolling teachers were uncertified, operating on a Letter of Permission (LOP). As well, several school and district positions have remained unfilled, including those that provide counselling and specialist services, instructional support, and even administration. On top of this, close to 50% of the teachers currently working in our schools are approaching retirement, compounding the issue significantly going forward. Many of these challenges themselves represent inequities in the provincial context, and they have had a negative impact on school and district climate and on the success of our learners.

## Current Strategic Plan Priorities

Coast Mountains School District is entering the second year of implementation of its new Strategic Plan – Engage, Ignite, Empower (<https://cmsd.bc.ca/strategic-plan>). With strong connections to the Board of Education's *mission* and *values*, and guided by the First Peoples Principles of Learning, the strategic planning process resulted in the identification of three overarching goal statements.

- **All learners will realize their full potential**
  - Learners are engaged in their learning, making clear connections to their personal interests, strengths, and passions.
  - Learners are developing essential skills in numeracy and literacy.
  - Learners are building 21st century competencies, including critical thinking and communication skills.
  - Learners are demonstrating proficiency in education, career and life planning.
- **We will honour and respect culture, diversity & inclusion**
  - Learners appreciate contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as experience Indigenous ways of knowing and doing.
  - Learners understand how cultural identity shapes world view.
  - The Coast Mountains School District workforce reflects the rich diversity in our local communities.
  - Inequities of outcomes are identified and barriers to learner success are removed.
- **We will facilitate well-being across the district**
  - Learning environments are welcoming, trauma informed and culturally safe for all learners.
  - Learners are developing strong relationships with peers and caring adults.
  - Learners are developing both socially and emotionally.
  - The well-being needs of learners are met by professionals working in collaboration.

Again this year, operational plans across all departments define both the efforts and resources necessary to meet the Board's bold vision over the next several years.

## Looking Back on the Year: Effectiveness of Implemented Strategies

In response to the launch of the Board's visionary Strategic Plan, the 2022-2023 school year saw the beginnings of a multi-year action plan aimed to positively impact the well-being and achievement of every learner in Coast Mountains School District. With an increasing focus on equity, creating safe, caring and welcoming learning environments, and classroom instruction that is engaging, culturally responsive and impactful, the school district is positioned for growth over the next several years.

In this first year of implementation, some of the successfully realized strategies include:

- The collaborative development of a District K-3 Literacy Strategy focused on building professional capacity related to evidence-based practices. Components of the strategy include delivery of teacher professional learning, acquisition of resources necessary to support effective literacy instruction, and service delivery across a multi-tiered system of supports, all guided by sound assessment evidence.
- The procurement and design of an online dashboard accessible by school and district staff to support conversations related to learner success. The dashboard supports the district in meeting responsibilities for reporting on learner success as per Local Education Agreements (LEA). The dashboard provides up-to-date learning data for all learners.
- Engagement in a robust district teacher recruitment and retention project, in partnership with other Northern BC School Districts and the Ministry, addressing teacher shortages impacting the success of learners, particularly in communities with high populations of Indigenous learners. In 2022-2023 approximately 10% of the district's teachers were uncertified operating on a Letter of Permission (LOP), and still other key support and service positions remain unfilled. Recruitment efforts secured many new educators, primarily from outside of the province.
- Coast Mountains School District offers a Teacher Mentorship Program to all teachers who are beginning their career or are new to our district. Mentoring is a central component in helping to build and strengthen a professional culture of collegiality, collaboration, and learning within schools and districts. Feedback from participants has been very positive and encouraging with some participants indicating that this type of support is aiding us in our efforts to retain new teachers.
- Purposeful collaboration and dialogue with Indigenous communities regarding supports, services and learner success, with planning underway for increased engagement in the year ahead.
- The design and implementation of a focused approach to service delivery and clarification of enhanced services to best meet the needs of all Indigenous learners, including the re-design of both structures and processes that create impact.
- An intentional yearlong focus on growing the professional capacity of Inclusion Teacher Mentors, supporting their school-based colleagues in meeting learners' needs and celebrating all forms of diversity in their schools.
- A team of French Immersion teachers created a French literacy screener for Grades K-4. This tool was developed to replace GB+ and is aligned with the work we are currently doing in English. A select group of teachers piloted this in the Spring of 2024. This tool will be used in the fall French literacy assessments.

- With the grants from the Ministry of Education and Child Care for both Seamless Day and Just B4 Preschool, our district was successful in not only opening one of each program, but five Seamless Day Programs, and two Just B4 Preschools. Many of our programs are at capacity and two Seamless Day Programs and one preschool have doubled in capacity. All sites but one have Early Child Educators running the programs.

To date feedback on the strategic actions undertaken within the district noted above have been positive, and there is acknowledgement that much more work is required to transform the system and realize the intended impacts for learners.

### Existing and/or Emerging Areas for Growth

Without question, a number of existing areas for growth were confirmed through the review and analysis of learner evidence across multiple data sets. Key measures of system progress, both local and provincial, indicate significant numbers of K-10 learners are not achieving grade level expectations in Literacy and Numeracy.

Across both curriculum areas, levels of success in Coast Mountains School District typically fall well short of the province, and there are very few instances of recent growth. Learners identifying as Indigenous, both on- and off-reserve, as well as those in care or with disabilities/diverse abilities are also lagging behind provincial measures.

Given the evidence of success at the elementary and middle level grades, it is also not surprising that high school transition rates, as well as the 5- and 6-year graduation rates for all groups of learners, are also lagging.

It is evident that given the long-term record of academic achievement, especially when examined through a lens of equity, that the district's approaches to supporting teaching and learning have not consistently had the necessary impact.

Some key initiatives are currently being undertaken in actioning the Board's strategic vision for growth to address some of these realities. Targeted professional learning to build capacity at K-3, for example, will support the literacy learning needs of our youngest learners, while the re-imagining of roles/responsibilities within the Indigenous Education Department will attend to improved service delivery and support across the system, including the monitoring of progress towards graduation for Indigenous learners at the secondary grades.

Not unlike other areas of the province, new emerging challenges have also had an impact on the overall achievement and well-being of learners across northwest communities. These include increased levels of substance abuse and mental health struggles among youth, and decreased levels of learner engagement and attendance, particularly noted among Indigenous students. These, coupled with ongoing workforce challenges, are presenting additional barriers that require our attention.

## Ongoing Strategic Engagement (Qualitative Data)

Strategic engagement is the targeted and meaningful involvement of district partners in addressing a specified need with the ultimate goal of improving student outcomes. Coast Mountains School District values the active engagement of all partners who are invested in the success of our learners - including parents, guardians, caregivers, local Indigenous Peoples, community members, educators, partnering agencies, learners themselves, and still more.

Recent examples of strategic engagement in the district included:

- **School District Working Groups**

During the 2022-2023 school year, a number of short-term working groups, primarily involving school district employees and community partners, were established. Working groups with mandates closely tied to learner outcomes included District Food Programming, Early Literacy Learning, Data Dashboard, Employee Wellness, and School Improvement Planning. Working groups operated by consensus to make decisions tied to their area of focus. These working groups are ongoing.

- **Northern Inquiry Project**

As part of the Northern BC Teacher Recruitment & Retention initiative, consultations took place in the Hazelton with school district employees, learners, First Nations representatives, and community partners. Input continues to support the efforts to establish a full complement of qualified teachers in Hazelton area schools.

- **Annual Budget Consultations, Including Survey**

Consultations took place in Spring 2023 related to school district priorities and the creation of the annual budget. Participants included partner groups, Trustees, Indigenous Peoples, and learners. A full community survey was administered in advance of the gathering of the Budget Working Group, providing an opportunity for all interested parties to help shape the budget priorities for 2023-2024.

- **Whole Staff Professional Learning Survey**

A survey of all school district employees was implemented in Spring 2023 to inform district staff in the ways employees wished to grow professionally in the 2023-2024 school year. Input from participants has been used to shape professional learning opportunities planned for the school year aligning with priority areas including Literacy, Numeracy, Well-being, Indigenous Education and Truth & Reconciliation.

- **District Education Committee**

The school district's Education Committee, a standing committee of the Board, has a very broad and inclusive membership including staff, District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), learners, local First Nations and more. The committee meets monthly with trustees and senior district staff to discuss matters related to learner achievement, learner support and school district issues. All meetings in 2022-2023 had a focus on learner outcomes, including the analysis and interpretation of the provincially issued *Aboriginal How Are We Doing?* report leading to discussions on changes necessary to improve outcomes for Indigenous learners throughout the school district.

- **Student & Family Affordability Fund Consultations**

With approximately \$500,000 one-time funding from the provincial government, extensive partner consultations took place in Fall 2022 to receive input on the best use of funds to support learners and families in Coast Mountains School District. Consultations occurred with First Nations, District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), community partners, and district employees, and an open ThoughtExchange was used for further input. As a result, equitable and targeted funding distribution decisions were made, and feedback with all partners ensured they were aware of how their contributions influenced the process.

- **School Student Forums**

Annually, the district works collaboratively with schools to promote student voice through learner participation in Student Forum events. In Spring 2024 input from diverse groups of learners was solicited on themes relevant to their lived experiences in classrooms, including belongingness and safety. Learner feedback was shared with school staffs and reported back to the Board of Education and community via the Regular (Public) Board Meeting.

Overall, school district strategic engagement was well utilized to gain timely input on several matters related to learner outcomes. Improvements to this important work can be made in 2024-2025 with increased attention to the planning process, with more intentional dialogue related to a planned annual schedule for engagement with our educational partners.

## Adjustment and Adaptations: Next Steps

The 2024-2025 school year represents the third year of the Board's Strategic Plan – Engage, Ignite, Empower 2022-2027 – developed with extensive community and partner consultation in 2021-2022. The school district will proceed with a number of action plan commitments across the three overarching goal areas, several of which were initiated during 2022-2023 as multi-year steps to improve outcomes for all learners served in Coast Mountains School District. With consideration of resources at hand and the accomplishments realized in 2023-2024, key next steps have been identified, including:

- **K-3 Literacy Strategy Implementation**

Following last year's development of an evidence-based approach to district wide literacy instruction across a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, early teacher adopters, including on-site Literacy support teachers, will begin to engage in professional learning and ongoing coaching using Acadience, a universal reading diagnostic tool, to guide instruction that builds learner skills and confidence across foundational, scaffolded literacy outcomes.

- **Enhanced District Services for Indigenous Learners**

In response to learner evidence, a re-imagining of the district's Indigenous Education Department has led to the collaborative creation of refined roles and responsibilities for team members, as well as the creation of new positions to support the monitoring of success for Indigenous learners K-12. Regional team members will provide wrap around support in relation to Indigenous youth outreach, while Indigenous Education Graduation Advisors will operate as a small team across 6 district schools to ensure learners are on track for success in Grades 8-12.



- **Teacher Recruitment & Retention**

With both a shortage of educators in British Columbia and a local teacher population largely approaching retirement, the district continued to prioritize teacher recruitment and retention in 2023-2024. Our team will continue to work with Ministry, local communities and Northern BC partners with this focus, as well as look to strengthen relationships with post-secondary institutions where we have experienced past recruitment success.

- **Electronic Dashboard**

Development of a virtual dashboard began in Spring 2023 and continued into the 2023-2024 school year. With an intuitive, user-friendly interface, the dashboard allows for school and district staff to securely access and engage with online information, including attendance and achievement evidence. Modules will be added over time that are responsive to the data needs of the adults using the evidence to guide decisions related to instruction and resource allocation, for example. The tool also provides for the generation of progress reports on Indigenous learners in support of the agreements that exist with local First Nations.

- **Culturally Respectful and Responsive Practices**

Coast Mountains School District has prioritized professional learning for all employees related to cultural awareness, especially pertaining to local First Nations, to best meet the needs of learners within our remarkably diverse, culturally rich school communities. This learning supports employees in acquiring the knowledge and cultural capacity to engage with learners and families in a manner that is both culturally respectful and inclusive.

- **Anti-Racism Learning & Action**

The provincial K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan provides the framework for addressing racism and discrimination in education, creating inclusive and caring climates where all learners and school community members feel they belong. Being anti-racist is more than having an awareness of racism - it's a call to support anti-racism through action. This priority area for 2023-2024 represented the school district's commitment to expand our collective understanding of racism in all its forms while empowering our learners to act through targeted school actions grants.

- **Indigenous Worldview & Knowledge Systems**

Coast Mountains School District is fortunate to have abundant resources and partnerships to support learners' understanding of Indigenous worldview and knowledge systems. For the 2023-2024 school year, the district prioritized enhancements to school programming that provided opportunities to learn on the land from First Nations Elders and Knowledge Holders, as well as further develop outdoor learning spaces that incorporate Indigenous language and cultural teachings.

- **K-12 Mental Health & Wellness Strategy Development**

With emerging needs identified across all school communities, district staff will engage with key partners, including Northern Health and BC Children's Hospital, to systematically plan for the health and wellness of learners K-12. For 2023-2024 these efforts aligned with school plans and include funding opportunities for learner-led health and wellness Action Grant initiatives.

- **Healthy Food Programming**

In response to feedback from partner groups and local First Nations, Coast Mountains School District will work collaboratively to develop and implement practices and standards that increase learners' access to healthy and culturally responsive food programming across all schools. With the support of community and national sponsors and the BC Feeding Futures Fund, the district will look to boost nourishing breakfast, snack, and lunch programming options for learners in a stigma free environment.

## Alignment for Successful Implementation

In Coast Mountains School District, key priorities associated with the strategic plan were presented to the Budget Working Committee in Spring 2023, along with budgetary requests to realize anticipated action plan commitments. Some of the priorities shared at that time included:

- **Teacher Recruitment & Retention**

With aspirations to improve educational outcomes for children while experiencing a teacher shortage, the priority of recruitment and retention represents a cost pressure. Funds must be prioritized for not only finding teachers, but ensuring there is ongoing mentoring support, especially for those individuals hired operating on Letters of Permission (LOP).

- **Data Dashboard**

Seen as a district tool to inform, communicate and simply elevate conversations related to learner outcomes, the dashboard is a new cost pressure shared by district and Indigenous Education Department.

- **Enhanced Supports and Services for Indigenous Learners**

In response to learner evidence, both qualitative and that received through story, a re-imagining of roles, responsibilities, and service delivery is unfolding with the Indigenous Education Department, funded internally by means of departmental funding.

- **Reconciliation, Anti-Racism & Mental Health Actions Grants**

Learner-led initiatives centre students in meaningful, action-oriented and relational learning that has great potential for both empowerment and genuine impact in local school communities.

For 2023-2024, third party sponsorship is playing a significant role in allowing the school district to proceed with priority action items related primarily to learning and Indigenous culture. With the generous financial support of local community donors, Coast Mountains School District has been fortunate to support the following:

- **K-3 Literacy Strategy**

Targeted donations are enabling educator professional learning, procurement of classroom instructional resources, and enhancements to literacy service delivery across tiers of support.

- **Outdoor Learning Spaces & Experiential Learning**

The creation of spaces and experiences incorporating Indigenous language, culture and knowledge are being supported in a limited number of schools, with aspirations for expansion over the remaining years of the strategic plan.

A final but critical component for system improvement, supporting the success of each child, are local school growth plans. To have impact, these plans must be grounded in the school's context and centered on the needs of its learners, while at the same time, aligned with the school district's priorities. In Coast Mountains School District, this means local school growth plans are crafted by school staff in pursuit of equitable outcomes for all learners. These plans are specifically focused on student learning, wellness, inclusion, and Indigenous culture.

In Spring 2023 a district working group met to discuss a collective approach by schools to engage meaningfully in the school improvement process. The group reviewed school planning processes around the province and identified promising practices for exploration over the 2023-2024 school year with alignment of goal areas. It is anticipated schools will be transitioning to an improved process and will also be making explicit their plans for schoolwide engagement as it relates to both Indigenous Education and Mental Health.

Moving forward, our school plans are meaningful roadmaps for growth and improvement in educational outcomes for children and youth. At the district level, meaningful engagement of all school staff members in the work, including intentional evidence-based instruction and assessment practices will be provided support for school leadership in the creation of school plans in a meaningful engagement where all school staff have a voice in the work.

## **Conclusion**

With its sights firmly set on the Board's visionary Strategic Plan – Engage Ignite Empower – the Coast Mountains School District is committed to improving educational outcomes for all learners, with a special lens of equity focused on those who have been historically marginalized and continue to experience lower levels of success. It is clear that there are great opportunities ahead for the meaningful engagement of all educational partners as they collectively build the capacity to best meet the needs of the learners and families served by our school district.