



Indigenous Education Report May 2025

This issue highlights events and projects funded through the 1.31 Enhancement Proposals, Elders Knowledge Holder Program and the work of the Indigenous Support Workers (ISW), alongside the meaningful contributions of teachers and schools who bring these initiatives to life in classrooms and on the land.

Gratitude

Thank you to all Elders, Knowledge Holders, ISWs, Teachers, and community partners who continue to guide and inspire the learners. Your efforts are helping to nurture identity, culture, and pride.

Spinning into Christmas – Student Film Project (April Release)

Spinning Into Christmas is a student-led film project inspired by the classic Hallmark-style holiday movie format. Chosen by the students at Hazelton Secondary School in teacher Lee Corneau's class, the film follows the journey of a young Indigenous woman who, after leaving her community for a fast-paced corporate life in Vancouver, rediscovers the importance of her cultural identity and connection to the land.

The project engaged 20–30 students, offering hands-on experience in the film industry and an opportunity to develop storytelling, filming, and production skills. Students were involved in all aspects of the filmmaking process, from script development to post-production.

To celebrate their achievement, a red-carpet premiere was hosted at the school with community members in attendance. The film was also screened at the local theatre to an audience of approximately 70 people and has since reached over 300 views on YouTube, with an estimated total viewership of 600–700.

Through this initiative, the school was able to purchase camera and audio equipment, laying the groundwork for future film projects. The process proved to be a highly meaningful and educational experience for many students. The filmmaking team is now working on a new project — a psychological thriller inspired by a Gitxsan legend about river otter people.

Video Link: [Spinning into Christmas \[HSS Filmmakers\]](#)



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Film Production & Performance Art at Hazelton Secondary
- Nature Walk at Skeena
- Balm Making at Hazelton Secondary
- Red Dress Day at Suwilaawks
- Cultural Understanding at Caledonia
- Land-Based Learning & Drum making at Hazelton Secondary
- Nation2Nation - KCH
- Celebrating Identity Through Art at Skeena
- Cooking with Suwilaawks
- New Director of Instruction – Indigenous Education

Grade 9 Studio Art Students Host Plant Walk on Howe Creek Trail

On May 13th, I had the privilege of joining Ms. Vanessa Gill's Grade 9 Studio Art class on a plant walk along the scenic Howe Creek Trail. The sun was shining, the air was crisp, and the morning was filled with learning, laughter, and connection. It was a wonderful opportunity to engage with students and staff beyond the classroom—students chatted and laughed together, clearly enjoying the time spent on the land. The walk was led by Carly Nabess, Two-spirit Métis Artist, Métis Elder Sandra Conlon, and Gitxsan Artist Frances Campbell.



Carly led us through the forest with care and intention, reminding us of the importance of building a respectful relationship with the land. We had the chance to learn about morel mushrooms, a seasonal

delicacy that grows in the region. Carly explained how to identify them properly, and the environments in which they grow. It was fascinating to learn how this prized mushroom connects to ecological understanding and the local environment.



Artists and Walk Leaders: (L-R) Frances Campbell, Carly Nabess, and Sandra Conlon



Superintendent MacMillan, Gr. 9 Students, and 'Grandfather Devil's Club' is growing in the background.



Ms. Gill enjoying the walk with her Gr. 9 students!



We also learned that Carly always hikes with a safety kit that includes plant identification books, which highlights the importance of being prepared and staying safe outdoors.

This experience was part of a broader school community art initiative—the Grade 9 Mural Project—which will be unveiled in a celebration ceremony at the end of June. The plant walk and the mural project are deeply connected, each supporting student learning, fostering relationships with the land, and highlighting the importance of cultural connection. I would like to thank Ms. Gill and the Grade 9 students for the warm invitation—it

was truly a memorable and enriching experience. I am also deeply grateful to Carly, Sandra, and Frances for leading the walk.

What a great day of learning and connecting with both land and community!

Tracey MacMillan, Superintendent



A morel mushroom.

Hazelton Secondary School: Balm Making



Hazelton Secondary School was privileged to welcome Tiffany Smith, a Gitksan Artist, for a special hands-on workshop with Grade 10 students in Ms. Brown's class, focusing on traditional balm making. This project beautifully blended land-based learning with cultural knowledge and science.

In the weeks leading up to Tiffany's visit, students gathered balsam buds from nearby cottonwood trees. These buds were then submerged in olive oil and gently infused over time using a crock pot water bath method. When Tiffany arrived, the class was prepared to take the next step: combining the infused oil with melted beeswax to create their own balms.



Under Tiffany's guidance, students experimented with the oil-to-wax ratio to produce different consistencies, from soft to firm balms. The experience was highly engaging, with students expressing pride in creating something meaningful with their own hands. Several shared that they planned to show their finished products to their aunts or Geets, highlighting the personal and cultural connections fostered through the activity.

This accessible and rewarding project not only deepened students' connection to the land and traditional practices but also fostered a sense of accomplishment and community. We are grateful to the Indigenous 131 Funds and the Role Model Program for making this valuable learning opportunity possible.



Honouring Red Dress Day



To honour Red Dress Day and raise awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S), Suwilaawks Community School, held a meaningful school-wide event on May 5, 2025 led by Indigenous Support Workers Roxanne Wright, Charity Spalding, and Marissa Harris.

In preparation for the day, students created red dress pins to wear in solidarity. The entire school participated in a community walk around the block, with Indigenous Support Workers drumming as students walked in remembrance and reflection. Upon their return to the school, students were welcomed by Ms. Wright, who offered a sage smudge to those who wished to participate. Staff explained the purpose and significance of smudging as a traditional cleansing and grounding practice.

The event was both educational and heartfelt. Many students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn, reflect, and honour the lives of those impacted by this difficult part of Canada's history. The collective walk and ceremony fostered a strong sense of community, awareness, and cultural respect among all participants.



Caledonia Secondary: Cultural Appropriate vs. Appreciation

On May 2, 2025, Jessica McCallum, a Gitxsan-Cree Artist and Jeweler, attended Caledonia Secondary School to speak on the important topic of Cultural Appropriation vs. Cultural Appreciation. This learning opportunity was supported by Stephanie Louie, Indigenous Support Worker and Sam Thom, Teacher, who helped coordinate and facilitate the session.

Jessica provided clear and meaningful insights into the difference between appropriation—using elements of culture without understanding or respect—and appreciation, which involves learning from, seeking permission, and honouring the origins of Indigenous traditions and practices.

Drawing on her own experiences and cultural knowledge, Jessica helped students and staff reflect through empathetic observation, considering the values, beliefs, and perspectives of First Peoples. The session emphasized the importance of respectful engagement, acknowledgment, and understanding.

This experience was both educational and inspiring. Students left with a deeper awareness of how to approach Indigenous cultures thoughtfully and respectfully. We are grateful to Jessica, Stephanie, and Sam for creating a space of learning, reflection, and cultural respect.



Outdoor Education, Plants and Medicine Workshop



On April 29, 2025, students participated from Hazelton Secondary School in a one-day Outdoor Education and Indigenous Plants & Medicine Workshop led by Role Model Ross McRae, a Gitxsan Knowledge Holder.

Ross shared his extensive knowledge of traditional plant use, connecting medicine, social responsibility, relationships, and ceremonial practices to plant knowledge. The workshop guided students through the full process of identifying local plants, understanding their traditional uses, and gathering them in respectful and sustainable ways.

This learning experience emphasized the importance of intent and personal connection when working with medicinal plants, including their spiritual significance and the responsibilities involved in traditional gathering. Ross offered teachings rooted in Indigenous perspectives, highlighting the deep relationship between land, culture, and community well-being. Students engaged in hands-on exploration and left with a greater appreciation for Indigenous land stewardship, traditional ecological knowledge, and the role of plants as medicine—both physically and spiritually.

Nation2Nation Women's Gathering

Students from Kitimat City High, accompanied by Indigenous Support Worker Debbie Dilg, attended the 3rd annual **Nation2Nation Women's Gathering** held in Kitimat, BC. The event, themed "*Taking Chances*," brought together a diverse group of mentors, leaders, and entrepreneurs to inspire and empower women across the Northwest.



Held on the traditional and unceded territory of the Haisla Nation, the gathering featured panel discussions, keynote speakers, workshops, and networking opportunities. Topics included women in leadership, intergenerational mentorship, trauma-informed care, and Indigenous cultural celebration.



This valuable experience supported students in building personal and professional resilience, fostering meaningful connections, and developing a deeper understanding of leadership and identity within Indigenous contexts.

Weaving Cedar Baskets – Honouring Culture Through Hands-On Learning

Cassie Hall Elementary – Ms. Jay's Class



Students in Ms. Jay's class at Cassie Hall Elementary had the meaningful opportunity to engage in traditional cedar weaving, supported by a strong circle of cultural and educational leaders. Under the guidance of Language & Culture Teacher Jenine Klein, Indigenous Support Workers Krystal Conway and Drieanne Porter, Indigenous Teacher Mentor Anna Ashley, and Tsimshian-Nisga'a Role Model Julie Bradford, students prepared cedar smgān and gained valuable hands-on experience weaving cedar baskets.

This activity not only deepened students' understanding of Indigenous culture and traditional knowledge, but also promoted patience, respect, and connection to the land. The collaborative environment offered a rich opportunity for mentorship, learning, and community building within the classroom.



Celebrating Identity Through Art: Collaborative Mural Project

Skeena Middle School – Ms. Gill’s Class



Students in Ms. Gill’s class launched a vibrant mural project that celebrates student identity, cultural expression, and community collaboration with Carly Nabess, a Two-Spirit Métis Artist, and Frances Campbell-Sam, a Gitksan Alumni Artist from the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art and Design. This project was guided with cultural insight and support from Ts’msyen Elder Sharon Bryant of the Kitsumkalum, Laxgibuu, and Métis Elder Sandra Conlon.

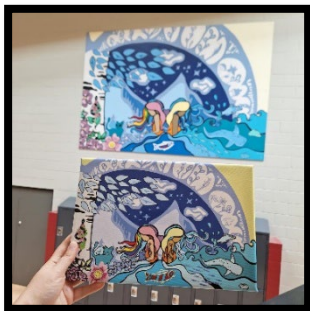
The mural, themed “Identity,” emerged from a meaningful and inclusive process. Students were involved in every stage—from conception and design to painting and celebration—sharing their stories, symbols, and ideas during collaborative workshops that reflected a wide range of personal and cultural perspectives. The final design was developed with the guidance of Carly Nabess and Frances Campbell-Sam, who supported the artistic process while centering student voices. The mural stands as a vibrant expression of the students’ collective vision and identity.

This initiative brought together Indigenous and Métis students, international students, and both francophone and French immersion learners. Aligned with the BC Arts Curriculum, it fostered collaboration, cultural and historical awareness, and encouraged students to reflect on the relationships between identity, place, and culture. It also provided students with a unique opportunity to engage with artists and to connect with Indigenous mentors from the community who supported students in expressing their stories through visual art.

More than just a mural, this project represents a transformational learning journey. With guidance from Métis mentors and the support of Kitsumkalum traditional territory holders, students were encouraged to reflect on their own identities and to build respect and appreciation for the identities of others. A plant walk with Carly Nabess and Sandra Conlon further enriched the experience, linking artistic symbolism with Métis traditional knowledge of plants, nature, and healing.

To respectfully conclude the project, Skeena Middle School hosted a closing gathering on May 23, 2025, where students, Artists, and Elders shared a meal and exchanged gifts of appreciation. The school remains committed to honoring Indigenous traditions through thoughtful and respectful actions.

Students were gifted a smaller replica of the mural which is now displayed at Skeena Middle School.



This mural stands not only as a stunning artistic achievement, but as a lasting symbol of identity, inclusivity, and community strength. It embodies the spirit of learning, respect, and collaboration that continues to flourish at Skeena Middle School.



Photo: L-R are: Carly Nabess, Frances Campbell-Sam, Sandra Conlon, Vanessa Gill, Jenine Klein, Sharon Bryant, and Emily Bryant.

Cooking at Suwilaawks



Suwilaawks Community School is pleased to share their weekly cooking group, led by Indigenous Support Worker Roxanne Wright.

Every Thursday, a group of students gathers in the kitchen to learn essential cooking skills in a supportive, hands-on environment. Originally held twice a week with different groups, the program now runs

every Thursday and continues to be a much-anticipated part of the school week. In our most recent session, the group made macaroni salad — a simple yet engaging recipe that allowed each student to actively participate. Using child-safe knives, students chopped vegetables, mixed ingredients, and worked together to create a delicious dish they were proud of.



These sessions offer more than just cooking skills; they help build confidence, encourage teamwork, and nurture a sense of responsibility and independence. Roxanne's leadership creates a space where students can connect, learn, and grow in ways that are both practical and empowering

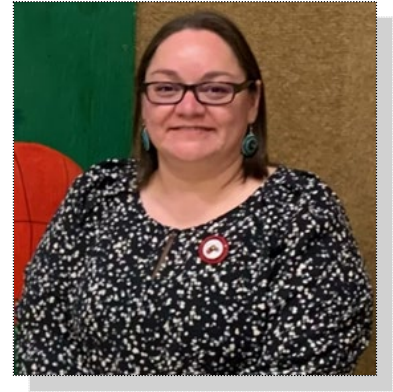
Finished Product



ANNOUNCEMENT

Coast Mountains School District is pleased to announce the appointment of Donna Mortimer to the position of Director of Instruction, Indigenous Education. Donna will assume her new position on August 1, 2025.

Donna brings more than 17 years of dedicated service in education, with a proven track record of leadership in Indigenous and inclusive education. A fluent speaker of her first language, Naskapi, from the Naskapi First Nation of Kawawachikamach, Quebec, Donna is also developing conversational proficiency in the language of the Tahltan Nation in British Columbia — an expression of her deep commitment to Indigenous language revitalization.



Throughout her career in British Columbia and Yukon Territory, Donna has held a range of impactful roles including Classroom Teacher, Learning Support Educator, Equity in Action District Lead, and District Vice Principal of Indigenous Education and Learner Support. She is widely respected for her passion, integrity, and unwavering dedication to student success.

Her leadership at both district and provincial levels has consistently advanced Indigenous education and inclusive practices. Donna has led innovative project-based initiatives grounded in Indigenous language, culture, and values, and is deeply committed to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. Her work reflects a thoughtful balance of cultural knowledge, educational expertise, and collaborative leadership.

Donna holds a Master of Education degree in Multiliteracies with a focus on Indigenous Education from the University of Western Ontario, and a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of Regina. She has also completed specialized training in Special Education and Level B Assessments from Queen's University of Ontario, as well as Crisis Intervention Training.

Coast Mountains School District extends its sincere appreciation to the members of the Inter-Tribal Education Committee for their thoughtful engagement throughout the selection process. Donna's appointment reflects a shared vision and commitment to excellence in Indigenous education through strong, values-based leadership. Her experience, insight, and integrity will be instrumental in deepening relationships, advancing equity, and fostering student success across the district.

We extend our warm congratulations to Donna and look forward to welcoming her and her family to our educational community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tracey MacMillan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tracey MacMillan
Superintendent of Schools

Elder/Knowledge Holder Role Model Program <i>Reviewed and Approved by the Inter-Tribal Education Committee & Indigenous Education Department</i>		
School	Project	Knowledge Keeper/Elder
Caledonia Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Photo Shoot – Indigenous Makeup Artist Indigenous Photo Shoot – Indigenous Hair Design Indigenous Artist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Samantha Wesley Stefany Godfrey Jessica McCallum
Cassie Hall Elementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly Drumming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vivian Carlick, Chris Peal Roxanne Woods
Hazelton Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge Plants and Balm Making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tiffany Smith
New Hazelton Elementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land based learning about frogs, learn about the Frog clan, crests, cultural history, and stories. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kitty Mowatt
District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blessing of Drums in each community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anne McDames
Thornhill Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oral Storytelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shalane Pauls

1.31 Indigenous Targeted Funded Projects – March/April 2025 <i>Reviewed and Approved by the Inter-Tribal Education Committee & Indigenous Education Department</i>
Hazelton Secondary School:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Haida Potato Cultivate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Day
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous Grad Photo Shoot
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Herring Eggs for Seasonal Rounds Teachings
Kitwanga Elementary School:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land Based Learning / Salmon Moonlit Creek