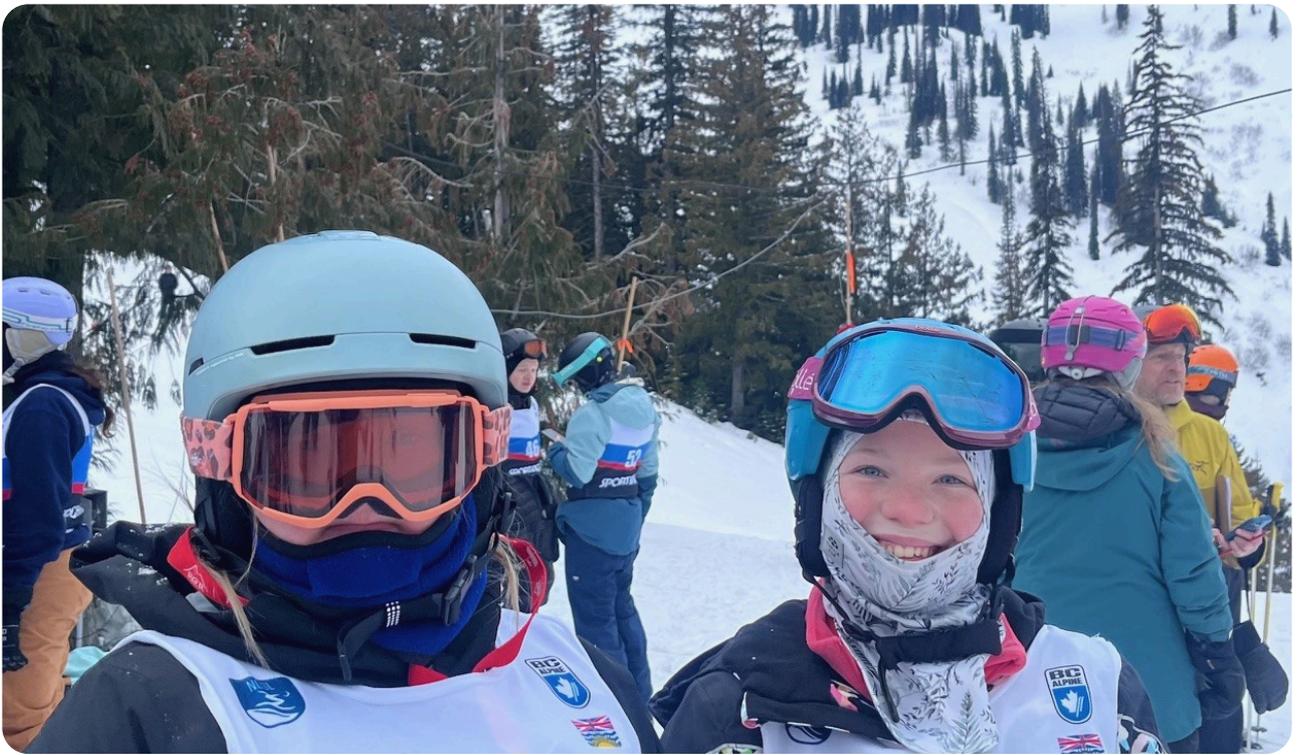


LEARNING TOGETHER

NO. 21



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In the Schools

LEARNING TOGETHER IN SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 5 (SOUTHEAST KOOTENAY)



As we begin this month, I want to acknowledge the tragic events that have recently taken place in Tumbler Ridge. Our thoughts are with that community as they navigate an incredibly difficult time. Events such as these affect us all, and they often spark important conversations about school safety, preparedness, and how we support students and families during times of uncertainty.

Following these events, the District Parent Advisory Council engaged in thoughtful discussion about what we have in place in the Southeast Kootenay School District to support safe schools. I want to reassure families that we have well-established critical incident response procedures. Our Director of Instruction, Jason Tichauer, serves as our Safe School Coordinator and leads the District's Critical Incident Response planning. Our district manual mirrors provincial guidelines and aligns closely with the terminology and best practices of Safer Schools Together. We regularly review and update our processes to ensure we are prepared and responsive.



After a highly publicized critical incident, it is common to see a surge in activity. Heightened awareness can lead to increased reporting of concerns, increased anxiety among students and families, and greater sensitivity to situations that might otherwise have felt routine. Recently, we experienced two incidents in our district that resulted in schools moving into a hold and secure out of an abundance of caution. In both cases, the RCMP responded promptly. While neither incident was directly related to students, these responses reflect our commitment to erring on the side of safety.

In times like these, maintaining calm, routine, and clear communication is essential. Our schools are guided by age-appropriate practices when discussing traumatic events with students. We focus on listening first, acknowledging feelings, providing factual and developmentally appropriate information, and reinforcing that students are safe. Structure and normal routines are important protective factors, and staff are encouraged to connect students with school counsellors and community supports when needed.

We also want to remind families of the many mental health and well-being resources available to support children, youth, and families. These include school-based supports, community agencies, and provincial services such as Kids Help Phone (24/7), the Suicide Crisis Helpline (9-8-8), Kelty Mental Health, Foundry, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Child and Youth Mental Health intake clinics, and the BC KUU-US Indigenous Crisis and Support Line, among others.

If families have concerns about student safety, they are encouraged to contact their school directly or use the provincial [ERASE reporting tool](#), which allows concerns to be reported confidentially online.

Looking ahead to the 2026–2027 school year, our draft school calendar has been posted for community input. We encourage families to review it and share feedback through the posted channels.

February also brings Pink Shirt Day celebrations across our district. Pink Shirt Day is an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to kindness, inclusion, and standing up against bullying. Schools will be recognizing this day in ways that are meaningful to their communities, reminding students that small acts of kindness and courage can have a significant impact.

One of the guiding commitments in our Strategic Plan is to foster caring, safe, and welcoming schools where every learner feels a sense of belonging. This month, primary classrooms are also taking another snapshot of Acadience data to help guide literacy instruction across the district. These brief, structured assessments allow teachers to identify strengths and areas for support, ensuring students receive timely and targeted instruction. This ongoing attention to literacy development is one of the ways we continue to strengthen learning outcomes for all students.

In challenging times, our strength lies in partnership. We remain committed to working together with families, staff, and community partners to ensure our schools are safe, welcoming, and responsive places for every learner.


Viveka Johnson,
Superintendent



Indigenous Education

Galt Museum and International Peace Pow Wow

Students from Laurie Middle, Parkland Middle and Mount Baker Secondary, along with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, traveled to Lethbridge, Alberta to visit the Galt Museum. During the visit, students had the honour of listening to Elder Blanche, a Blackfoot woman, who shared stories, teachings, and knowledge rooted in Blackfoot traditions. Her words offered students a deeper understanding of culture, history, and the importance of oral storytelling.

Students also had the opportunity to tour the museum exhibits, further connecting classroom learning to lived history and local perspectives.

The following day, the group attended the International Peace Pow Wow, where they experienced powerful drumming, beautiful regalia, and traditional dancing. The students were proud to participate in some of the dances, demonstrating respect, courage, and community spirit.



Early Learning and Child Care

District Principal of Early Learning and Child Care
Laura-Lee Phillips



Grand Opening of the Steeples StrongStart and Child Care Facility

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the grand opening of the new Steeples StrongStart and Child Care Facility on February 3.



Cranbrook Steeples Clubhouse



News from District Teachers



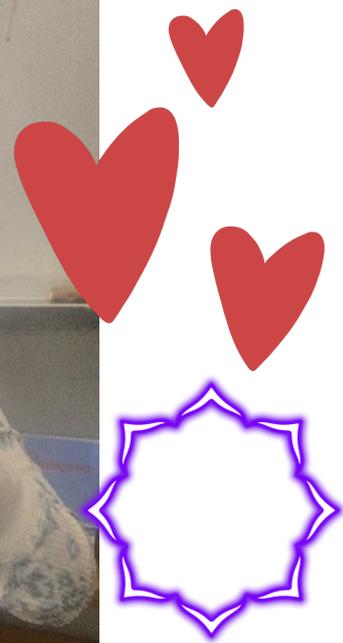
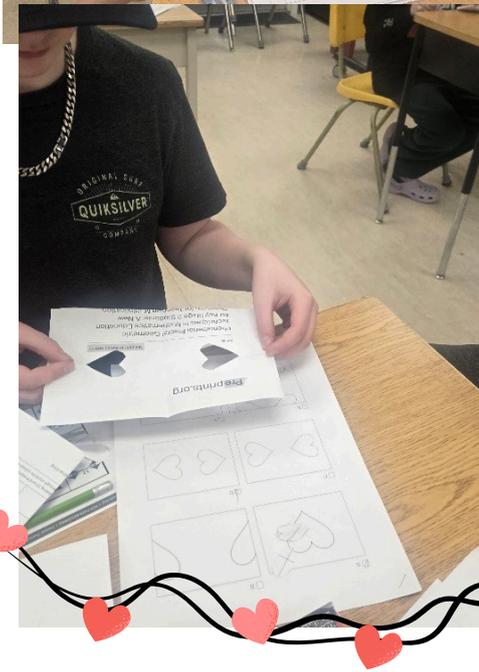
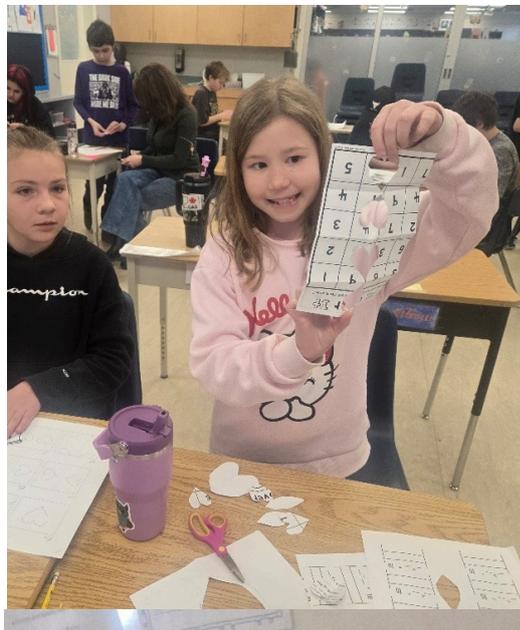
District Numeracy Teacher, Nicole Fulton

February offered two great examples of students experiencing mathematics through art and movement.

At Gordon Terrace, a Grade 6 class explored a Valentine's-themed lesson inspired by Kathy Paur's Cutting Out Hearts. Students were challenged to create increasingly complex heart designs using as many folds as they wanted, but only one cut. As they worked, they examined symmetry and transformations and asked what made some designs possible, and others not.

At Highlands, a Grade 2/3 class created tri-fold hexaflexagons as part of their geometry work. The focus was on careful folding and noticing what happened as the shape flexed. Students were excited to discover that their creation had three different faces and enjoyed decorating each side. Through the process, they experienced symmetry and transformation in a concrete, hands-on way.

Across both classrooms, students were actively building and exploring rather than simply observing. Research continues to show that students understand mathematics more deeply when they explore and notice patterns for themselves.



News from District Teachers



District Literacy Teacher, Laura-Lee Phillips

Growing Readers Across the Southeast Kootenay

March is a time of renewal and growth and in the Southeast Kootenay School District, it is also a time to celebrate literacy.

Literacy is at the heart of student success. It empowers learners to think critically, communicate confidently, and engage meaningfully with the world around them. From our earliest learners to students preparing for graduation, reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills are nurtured every day in classrooms across the District.

In schools throughout Cranbrook, Jaffray, Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford, educators are fostering a love of reading through engaging classroom instruction, vibrant library programs, storytelling, inquiry projects, and meaningful discussions. Whether students are building foundational phonics skills, exploring novels, analyzing complex texts, or expressing their ideas in writing, literacy connects learning across all subject areas.

Strengthening Writing Instruction

This year, teachers across the District participated in professional learning focused on enhancing writing instruction. Adrienne Gear facilitated a three-part learning series designed to strengthen literacy practices and deepen student engagement in writing.

Throughout the sessions, Adrienne shared strategies to help teachers establish an effective, process-driven writing program centered on regular weekly practice writes. She offered practical ideas for organizing a year of writing instruction around key text structures, including personal narrative, nonfiction, and story writing.

Adrienne also modeled a variety of mini-lessons focused on writing techniques to raise the quality of student work, while sharing valuable insights on assessment, writing conferences, and supporting student growth over time.

A key focus of the series was the intentional use of rich read-alouds and anchor books to model strong writing and deepen student understanding. Through thoughtfully selected mentor texts, teachers explored ways to inspire student writers and foster meaningful literacy conversations. Rather than scripted programs, these approaches provide flexible frameworks that help educators build strong, responsive literacy foundations within their classrooms.

Participants came away with an abundance of new anchor books, mentor texts, and writing lesson ideas to bring back to their classrooms.

Writing Power is a metacognitive approach grounded in research and designed to support high-quality writing instruction for all students. This practical, user-friendly resource provides daily lesson ideas, ongoing assessment strategies, and connections to outstanding contemporary children's literature.

Literacy does not only happen at school; it grows through everyday conversations, shared experiences, and curiosity about the world.

As we head toward spring break and the final stretch of the school year, we encourage everyone to continue nurturing a love of reading and learning.

For Staff:

For more information, please visit the Curriculum and Assessment - District Literacy Support page on the Staff Hub.

For Parents and Caregivers:

To learn more about supporting literacy at home, explore these helpful resources:

[Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers](#)

[Literacy at Home | Reading Rockets](#)

[Families and Caregivers - The Reading League](#)

[Early Years Learning](#)





OUTDOOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



Fernie Secondary Outdoor Education



The Fernie Secondary Outdoor Education 8/9 class spent an immersive day in the Silver Springs area during a winter survival field trip.

Students learned various Ktunaxa language and the ecology of the region while developing practical winter survival skills. They demonstrated strong physical effort and perseverance by hiking through winter conditions while carrying their gear, building and starting fires using materials from their surroundings, and preparing food over an open fire. This hands-on experience was highly engaging and provided students with a memorable opportunity to challenge themselves while connecting learning to the land.





IN THE SCHOOLS



News from Schools Across the District



Sparwood Secondary School Wood and Metal Shop

Check out the amazing creations from Mr. Ware's woodwork and metal shop classes at Sparwood Secondary.



New Jerseys for Rocky Mountain Elementary

Rocky Mountain Elementary School has new jerseys this year thanks to the help of some amazing donors including The Elkford Project Society, McRae's Auto Electric Ltd., and ATCO.





IN THE SCHOOLS



News from Schools Across the District

Back in the Gates: High School Ski & Snowboard Racing Returns to Fernie

On February 6, 2026, 114 student-athletes gathered at Fernie Alpine Resort for the Eastern Kootenay Championships, marking the return of high school ski and snowboard racing to the Elk Valley. For many students, this was their first time pulling on a bib and stepping into a start gate to represent their school, and the stoke was in the air from the first chair of the morning.

Fernie Secondary School and Kootenay Discovery School joined forces to create a joint team and competed alongside schools from across the region. Athletes showed courage, effort, and great sportsmanship, cheering teammates on after clean runs and helping each other back up after tough ones. The adaptive racers were a true highlight and received some of the biggest cheers of the day.

Several Elk Valley athletes have now qualified for Provincials, an awesome accomplishment and a proud moment for our schools and community.

