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Happy Holidays

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



Southeast Kootenay School District is alive with celebration as we move into the festive season. Across our communities, students and staff are preparing concerts, winter festivals and special events that highlight the remarkable talent and creativity found in every school. December brings a special kind of energy to education, and this year our classrooms and performance spaces have been filled with anticipation, music and joy. 🎵

One of the most treasured traditions in our region is the annual mass choir performance, known today as the Cranbrook Children's Christmas Choir. This longstanding community event takes place on the first Wednesday of December each year, and its roots reach back to the 1960's.

The format familiar to us today has been in place since 1971. The origins of the choir reflect a meaningful story of cultural exchange. When Roy Barnett, principal of Amy Woodland School, arrived from England, he brought with him the idea of a school-based mass choir, a tradition common in English schools. Working alongside dedicated educators, including the father, Brian Lutz, of current second-generation music teacher Kim Lutz, Barnett helped bring the vision to life. What began as a shared idea has grown into a multi-generational tradition that continues to unite our community. Today, more than 300 students from nine schools join together, supported by music teachers who collaborate to select songs, coordinate conducting roles and manage the many logistics involved in preparing young performers for such an important evening. For students, the performance is always a night to remember, and for families and staff, it remains a joyful reminder of the power of community. 🍪 🍪 🍪 🍪

Throughout the fall and early winter, Trustees have been engaging directly with schools across the District. Their visits provide valuable opportunities to connect with staff and students, observe classroom learning and gain insight into the initiatives and experiences that shape daily life in our schools. These connections continue to strengthen relationships and deepen our collective understanding of the work happening across the District.

This season, we are also reflecting on a key element of our 2024 to 2028 Strategic Plan, which calls us to amplify student voices and transform systems so that every learner is supported, included and empowered. This focus was at the heart of our professional learning day on December 4, when principals, vice principals, itinerant teachers, district leaders and community partners gathered for a full day of learning inspired by the work of Dr. Sean Lessard. Together, participants explored how systems shift when we listen deeply, build relationships and honour the diverse experiences of students and families. This work is guiding the District as we move forward thoughtfully and intentionally. 🌸

With report cards now distributed and Foundational Skills Assessments complete, we enter a period of reflection on student learning. In assessing how we are doing as a district, we look to triangulated data that combines provincial, district and school-based evidence. These measures help identify trends and shape future goals. Yet data alone never tells the full story. Every student has a unique background, a personal set of experiences and individual strengths that numbers cannot fully capture. Understanding these stories is essential to providing meaningful support. Evidence informed practice combined with relationship centred understanding remains at the heart of our work in the Southeast Kootenay District.

As we celebrate the holiday season, we remain mindful that this time of year can be challenging for many students and families. If support is needed, please reach out to your school. Staff and community partners are ready to help ensure that every child and family feels cared for and connected. 🌸

As we close the year, we extend our thanks to students, families, staff and community members for the care, dedication and spirit they bring to the District. May your holidays be filled with warmth, connection and rest. We look forward to continuing to learn together in the new year.

V. Johnson
Superintendent



Early Learning and Child Care

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



NEWS



New Shared Early Learning Space Opening in January

We are excited to share an update about a wonderful new development at Steeples Elementary. Beginning in January, our brand-new shared early learning space will officially open, offering several valuable programs for children and families in our community.

This new area has been designed as a welcoming, flexible environment that will support a variety of programs throughout the day. It will be home to:



StrongStart Early Learning Program

StrongStart will run Monday through Thursday, offering free, play-based early learning for children aged birth to five and their parents/caregivers. Families can look forward to engaging activities, circle time, hands-on learning, and wonderful opportunities to connect with others. Mondays through Thursdays from 9:00 am - 11:30 am and 12:15 pm - 2:45 pm.

Please visit the office prior to or the morning of with your child's birth certificate and proof of residency to register for StrongStart. If you have registered online, please email cbal.ngreen@sd5.bc.ca with your registration, birth certificate, and proof of residency.

Steeple's Clubhouse After-School Care

The Cranbrook Boys and Girls Club will provide after-school care from the new space each afternoon. This partnership will support many families by offering convenient, on-site child care at the end of the school day. Beginning in September, we also hope to expand this service to include before-school care to further support our families' needs.

BGC Cranbrook Website and steeples@bgccranbrook.ca

Contact information: Christine Harvey christine@bgccranbrook.ca

Steeple's Elementary Classroom Use

During the school day on Fridays, Steeples teachers and students will also use the space. This flexible learning area will give classes additional opportunities for small-group work, exploration, and hands-on learning experiences.

Throughout December, our teams have been busy setting up materials, completing licensing requirements, and ensuring everything is ready for a smooth start after winter break. The shared space is coming together beautifully, and we can't wait to welcome children and families in the new year.

We want to extend our appreciation to our families and community partners for their support as we bring this exciting project to life. This shared space will offer wonderful opportunities for learning, care, and connection.

StrongStart - Cranbrook



- A free, parent-accompanied play and learning program for children ages 0-5.
- Snacks provided.
- Play-based and learning activities facilitated by a qualified early childhood educator.

Monday-Thursday
9:00-11:30 and 12:15-2:45
Follows school calendar



StrongStartBC

Steeple's Elementary
School
250-426-0430
cbal.ngreen@sd5.bc.ca

Play
Connect
Learn

We gratefully acknowledge the financial contribution of the Province of British Columbia through the Ministry of Education and Child Care.

bgc
Cranbrook
Steeple's Clubhouse



Indigenous Education

Ktunaxa Pine Needle Baskets

The Contemporary Indigenous Studies class at Sparwood Secondary had the opportunity to study and learn the traditional Ktunaxa art of making pine needle baskets. Thank you to Faye and Dianne for teaching us about this tradition! The class also created mitten-shaped Christmas tree decorations inspired by traditional Indigenous art, incorporating meaningful patterns and symbols. Students learned about the cultural significance of these artistic traditions and the stories they carry, fostering respect, understanding, and connection.



Wačkna

Kase J went hunting, harvested a deer and generously brought in some of the meat. With their contribution, the Laurie Middle Alternative Learning Class helped prepare, cut, and smoke the meat in the school smoker.

Everyone got to enjoy some delicious wačkna (beef jerky).

Ktunaxa Language Class

Ktunaxa Language Class is held every Friday at Laurie Middle School when school is in session. In December, Ms. Juanita taught students how to write and say "Merry Christmas" in Ktunaxa. Students created Christmas Cards for their families and learned several Ktunaxa words connected with the holiday season.

Kusmukusał ɕxamałitł



News from District Teachers



District Numeracy Teacher, Nicole Fulton

This month the District Numeracy Teacher worked with staff at TM Roberts Elementary to explore how manipulatives can strengthen number sense across the grades. They looked at how consistent use of hands-on tools helps students build on previous learning as they move from kindergarten to grade 6. Time was also spent on the BC Learning Pathways and how they can support shared language around mathematical thinking and proficiency.

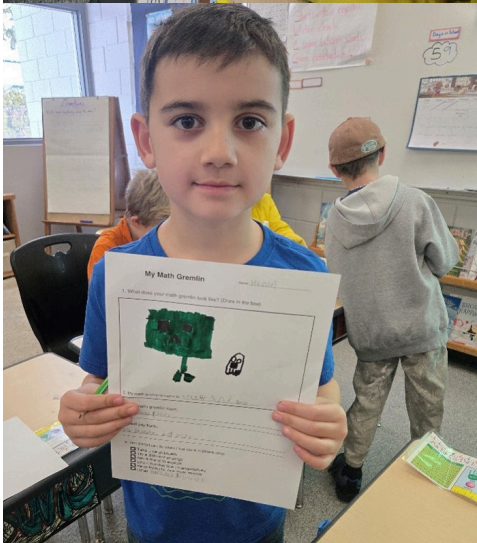
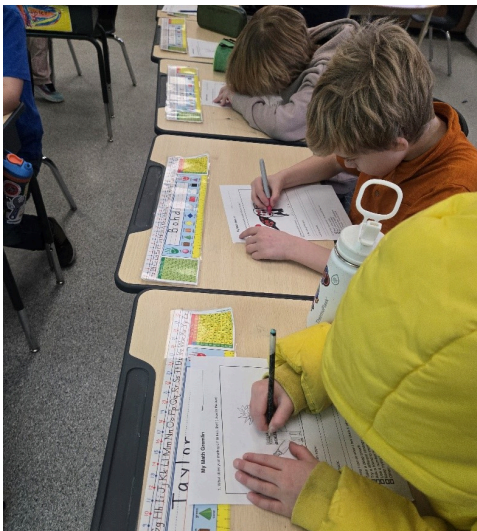
The Coast Metro Elementary Math Project website (<https://coastmetro.ca/elementary-math-project/>) was another valuable resource, especially the spiraled year plans that allow teachers to revisit key ideas throughout the year.

At Highlands Elementary, grades two and three students took part in a lesson on math identity inspired by research from Liesl McConchie. Students drew their “math gremlins,” externalizing unhelpful thoughts instead of internalizing them, and wrote positive affirmations to talk back to their gremlins. Learn more here:

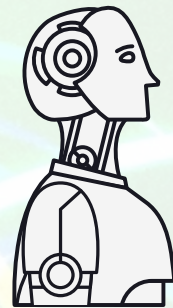
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/developing-student-math-identity/>

Rekenrek building was shared with grade one classes across the District including Steeples, Frank J. Mitchell, and Isabella Dicken, giving students a visual and tactile tool to model counting and early operations.

As the District moves into winter, we are looking forward to continuing to work with teachers and students. If you would like to explore manipulatives, learning pathways, or math identity in your school, please reach out.



DISTRICT DESIGN LABS



Teachers of Transformative Learning Ryan McKenzie and Kim Froehler

Lights and Robotics

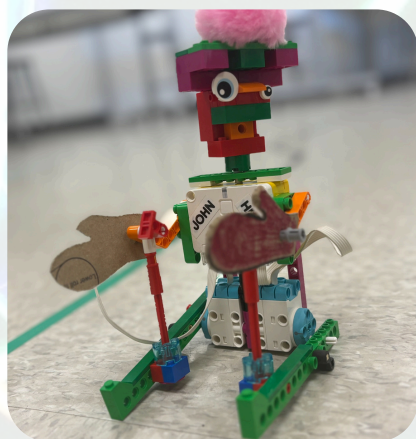
Students from Ms. Spergel's grade one class explored the concepts of lights and robotics by building coloured flashlights. They took the flashlights outside to observe the interplay of different colours reflecting on the snow.

Sweater Ornaments

Ms. Bisson's class from Rocky Mountain Elementary enjoyed a field trip to the Design Lab in Fernie, where they designed and created ugly sweater ornaments using 3D pens.

Digital Tools Across the District

This year, students and teachers across the District are embracing digital platforms to enhance learning and communication. Over 750 students have joined Typing Pal and Tap'Touche, boosting their digital literacy skills in both English and French. Seesaw continues to thrive, with more than 40 classes and nearly 1,000 students sharing their learning and connecting with families. As high school teachers transition to Microsoft Teams, the Transformative Learning Team (TLT) has stepped up to support by meeting educators in schools, online, and helping with account setup to ensure a smooth shift into modern learning environments.



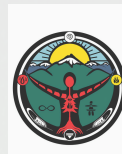
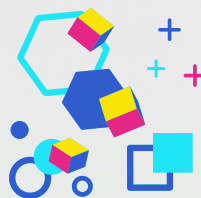
COOL

Do You Cross Country Ski?

Students from Mrs. Porter's class at Steeples enjoyed an exciting hands-on visit focused on creativity and problem-solving. The day began with a brainstorming session about what cross-country skiers feel, see, and say, sparking imaginative ideas for a ski-themed environment. Using LEGO, cardboard, and ChompSaws, students built a dynamic ski area complete with jumps, mountains, hills, trees, and even animals. After constructing and customizing LEGO cross-country skiers, the fun continued as students programmed their skiers to navigate the obstacles they had created. This engaging activity combined design, technology, and teamwork, giving students a chance to bring their ideas to life in a playful and interactive way.

Corrugated Costumes

Students in Mr. Flegel's class recently brought their imaginations to life through a hands-on design challenge using Chompsaws, a student friendly cardboard table saw and MakeDo kits, school friendly reusable screws and tools. Their cardboard creations included a sophisticated penguin, a remote control and TV, and a whimsical unicorn. Before building, students used an AI image generator to visualize their ideas, supported by a teacher to help them plan the scale and structure of each costume. This process also sparked thoughtful discussions about the limitations of AI-generated designs, as students identified which elements were realistic and which needed to be adapted for the physical world.



OUTDOOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



Michael Kelly, Director

Sparwood Secondary Winter Survival Skills

The Sparwood Secondary Outdoor Education class had to change their plans when severe weather forced them to cancel their off-site trip, so they hosted an adapted version of their Winter Survival Skills Olympics at school instead.

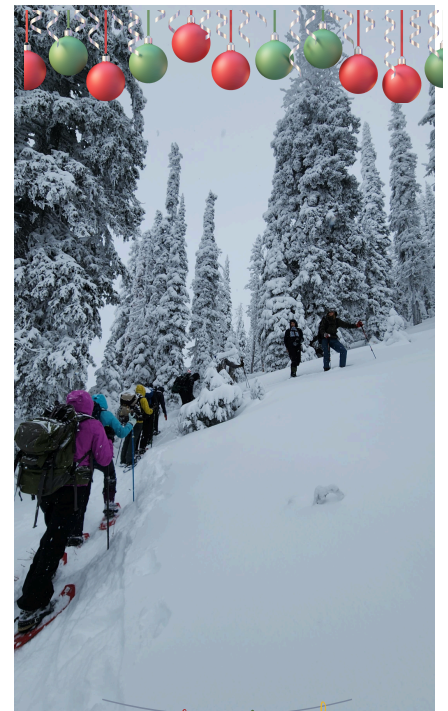
Students raced across the field on their handmade emergency snowshoes, laughing as they tested their creations on the snowy ground. They also built emergency shelters using whatever materials were available, turning the change of plans into a creative and memorable challenge.



Mount Baker Environmental Awareness Program

Mount Baker Secondary's EAP 12 students worked hard during November gaining new skills and knowledge to help them be successful winter camping for three nights at Kootenay Pass. It was their final overnight trip of the semester and it was a joy to see the students take on leadership roles, guiding each other on our day hike, taking on jobs around camp like water making, wood chopping and leading our awesome nightly debriefs.

A highlight for students was all the snow that fell and building and sleeping in snow shelters! Students were so well prepared for the trip and that was a huge part of the success.



'TIS THE SEASON AROUND THE DISTRICT



Peyton has been enjoying going swimming and loved trying out the swim chair. The swim chair allowed her to be independent in her movements, and she was able to experience the waves for the first time!



The Human Resources Department attended a Career Fair at the University of Lethbridge in December.



School Based Teams have been collaborating across the District.



Congratulations to Zoey from Parkland for winning second prize in the Remembrance Day Poetry contest.

Pictured: Michelle Bannister, Zoey, Cynthia Stuart and Brenda Tyson.



Dr. Sean Lassard presented at the Principals and Vice Principals' Leadership session on December 4. Participants explored how systems shift when we listen deeply, build relationships and honour the diverse experiences of students and families.



'TIS THE SEASON AROUND THE DISTRICT



École Isabella Dicken Elementary School grade two and three students celebrated their annual Elf Day! They filled the community with holiday spirit. Dressed as cheerful elves, the students led a toy drive, with local firefighters stopping by to collect the donations and deliver them to the Snow Valley Christmas Cheer Society. The young elves also visited local senior homes, sharing handmade cards and singing festive carols to brighten residents' days. This beloved tradition ties directly into the students' learning about citizenship, giving them hands-on opportunities to show kindness, generosity, and care for their community. Elf Day continues to be a highlight of the season.



Frank J Mitchell Elementary celebrated with red and green holiday sweaters. → ← ❄️



The annual Board Office Potluck was December 11. This annual event is filled with laughter, joy and great food!



The Hearing Loss clinic donated Christmas gifts to PES and TMRES. Calem was one of the lucky recipients.



A picture says a thousand words... ❄️ ❄️ ❄️





Happy Holidays

*from the Southeast Kootenay School
District*

Schools will be closed for
Winter Break from
December 22, 2025 to
January 2, 2026

