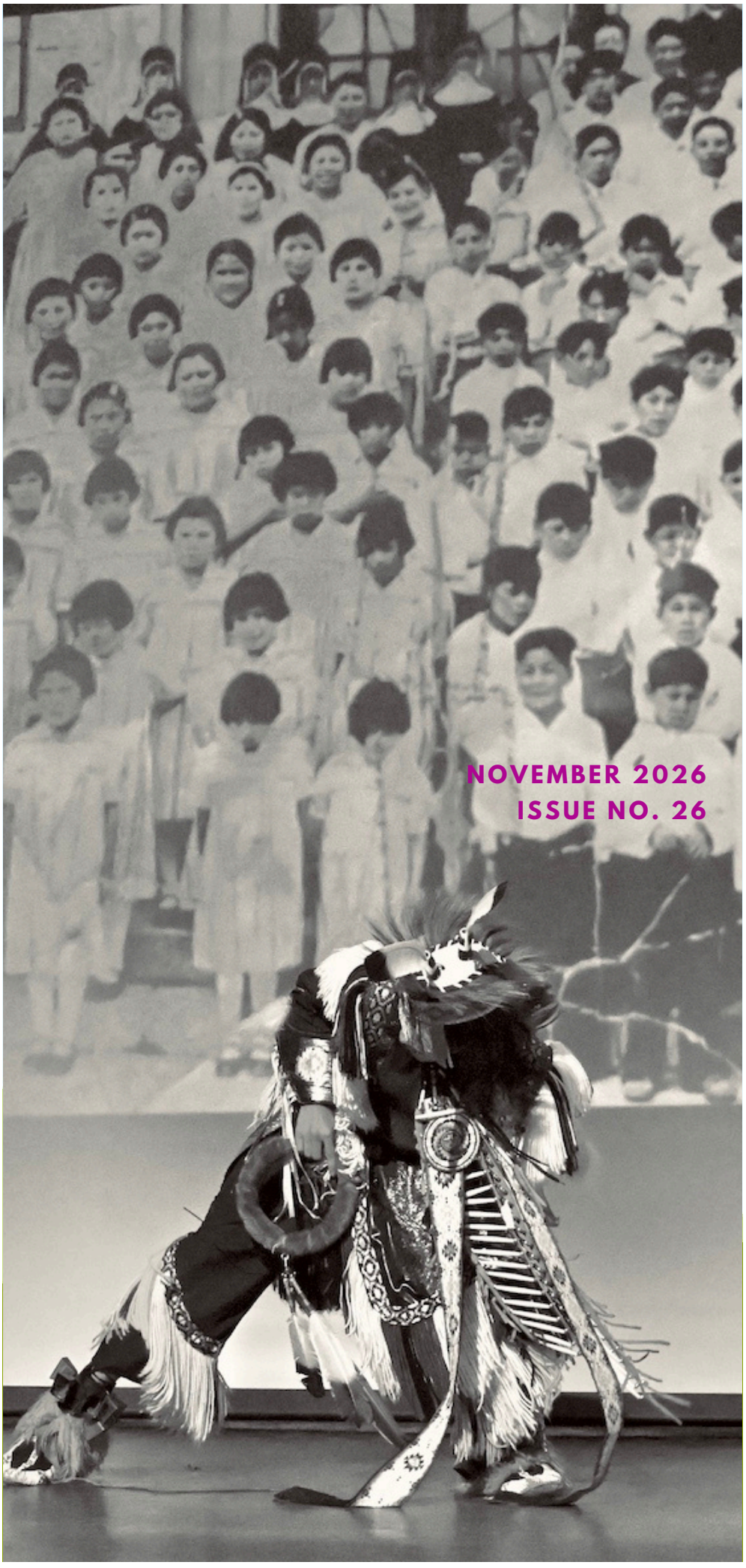
# LEARNING TOGETHER

## NO. 26



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# LEARNING TOGETHER IN THE SOUTHEAST KOOTENAY SCHOOL DISTRICT



As we move through November, I continue to be inspired by the many ways our students, staff, families and community partners come together to support learning, celebrate achievements and care for one another.

November has been a significant month for the Southeast Kootenay School District as we welcomed our newly elected Board of Education. The inaugural meeting on November 10 marked the beginning of a new four-year term. Congratulations to Doug McPhee on being elected Board Chair. I look forward to working alongside the trustees to advance the priorities of our 2024–2028 Strategic Plan and extend my sincere appreciation to our outgoing trustees for their dedication and service.

The District community is also mourning the loss of newly elected Trustee Cheryl Christensen. Although her time on the Board was brief, her commitment to her community will be remembered. On behalf of the District, I extend heartfelt condolences to her family, friends and all those whose lives she touched.

Across the District, students and staff participated in meaningful Indigenous Veterans Day and Remembrance Day ceremonies, honouring the courage and sacrifices of those who have served Canada. Through music, readings, reflection and student-led tributes, our schools demonstrated respect and gratitude while reinforcing the importance of remembrance.

November also provides an opportunity to recognize Métis Week and celebrate the history, culture and contributions of Métis people. The raising of the Métis flag at Mount Baker Secondary School was a meaningful expression of recognition and respect, reflecting our ongoing commitment to reconciliation and inclusion.

I am pleased to share that the District has ratified a collective agreement with CUPE Local 4165. This agreement reflects the collaborative efforts of both bargaining teams and recognizes the important contributions of our support staff in creating safe, welcoming and supportive learning environments.

Professional learning remains a priority, with educators participating in opportunities focused on assessment, literacy and numeracy. Our 2026 Interim Progress Report, developed through the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning, reinforces the importance of using evidence to guide instruction, strengthen student achievement and identify areas requiring additional support.

October also provided opportunities for experiential and outdoor learning. Through Take Me Outside activities, students explored their surroundings and developed skills beyond the classroom. At Gordon Terrace Elementary, Innovation Hour brought students, staff and volunteers together for hands-on activities that encouraged creativity, critical thinking and collaboration.

As elementary schools complete parent/teacher interviews and secondary schools share their Learning Updates, families across the District will be receiving information about their children's progress. These updates provide opportunities to celebrate growth, identify areas for continued development and strengthen communication between home and school. I encourage families to review these updates and connect with teachers whenever they have questions.

Our Strategic Plan reminds us that student success extends beyond academic achievement. Creating inclusive learning environments, fostering positive relationships and supporting student and staff well-being are equally important. The many activities and learning opportunities taking place across our District reflect these commitments in action.

Thank you to our students, staff, families, trustees and community partners for your continued support of public education.

V. Johnson

Viveka Johnson,
Superintendent

erase | EXPECT RESPECT & A SAFE EDUCATION

# Introducing
# THE BOARD OF EDUCATION 2026–2030

## Doug McPhee - Board Chairperson (City of Cranbrook - Electoral Area C)



Doug was born and raised in Cranbrook and has dedicated more than four decades to public education. Beginning his teaching career in 1982, he went on to serve in school administration and district leadership positions before retiring in 2014 and continuing his service as an elected school trustee.

Throughout his career, Doug has worked in areas including Indigenous education, student and staff safety, Restorative Justice, technology, alternative education, and educational leadership.

As Board Chairperson for the past four years, Doug has helped guide the district through significant challenges, including school facility planning, capital projects, and advocacy for improved educational funding. His provincial involvement includes serving as President of the Kootenay-Boundary Branch of the BC School Trustees Association and contributing to provincial committees addressing compensation for exempt education staff and capital funding for the replacement of aging school facilities.

Doug is actively involved in his community, volunteering with the Salvation Army School Meals Program, the Cranbrook Legion, and Rotary. He also supports initiatives advancing prostate cancer research and organizations providing assistance to individuals experiencing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Each December, Doug and his wife, Deb, bring the spirit of Christmas to local celebrations and children's community events through their appearances as Santa and Mrs. Claus. Having raised his family in Cranbrook, Doug values the importance of strong schools and healthy communities. He believes effective school board governance is built on collaboration, accountability, and a shared commitment to providing every student with opportunities to succeed.



## Pamela Berry - Trustee (City of Cranbrook - Electoral Area C)

Pamela has proudly called Cranbrook home for the past 19 years, where she and her husband own and operate a local construction company. She is a proud mother of five children, all of whom have graduated, and a grandmother to two wonderful grandchildren. Having raised her family in Cranbrook, she has a strong connection to the community and a genuine interest in seeing local schools and students thrive. Volunteering has always been an important part of Pamela's life. Over the years, she has been involved with organizations and school programs, including KEYSA Soccer for 12 years, the Sam Steele Society, Operation Christmas Child, school breakfast programs, Highlands Elementary PAC, and Mount Baker Secondary School PAC, where she served for more than five years. She has also been involved in planning graduation events for four of her children at Mount Baker Secondary School. These experiences have given her an appreciation for the importance of community involvement, parent engagement, and creating positive opportunities for children and youth.

Pamela enjoys spending time outdoors and believes in the value of lifelong learning and personal growth through new experiences. She looks forward to building relationships with educators, students, parents, and families throughout the school district, listening to their perspectives, and working together to support schools and help every student succeed.

## Irene Bischler - Trustee (City of Cranbrook - Electoral Area C)



After 30 years of experience in education in the Southeast Kootenay School District, Irene is excited to be joining the Board of Education as a trustee for her second term. Working as a Youth Care Worker enabled Irene to pursue her passion for ensuring the proper supports were distributed to all students across the district. In addition to receiving the BC Medal of Good Citizenship in 2021, Irene has worked and supported youth through power skating and as a figure skating coach. She has also supported the many employees of the Southeast Kootenay School District as past president of the CUPE Local 4165 Union.

Irene enjoys a healthy active lifestyle that can be attributed to the beautiful community where she lives. Irene is looking forward to continuing to strengthen her partnerships with parents, educators, support staff and administration.

# Introducing
# THE BOARD OF EDUCATION 2026–2030

## Alysha Clarke - Trustee (Regional District of East Kootenay – Electoral Area B)




Alysha grew up in Fernie and has enjoyed the switch to living in a rural community with her husband and children for the past 16 years in Baynes Lake. She is a Registered Massage Therapist, owning and operating her own clinic in the Elk Valley for the past 22 years. This has allowed her to speak with many people with different points of view and backgrounds and understand the diverse needs and opinions of her community. Alysha is a proud mother of three, which has led her to be an active volunteer in her community. She has volunteered with the Baynes Lake Parks and Rec Society, Girl Guides Canada, Jaffray PAC, 4-H and Ag & More.

Alysha is excited to speak with students, parents, and staff to reflect on how our school has grown over the years and collaborate on ideas of where we would like to see it go over the next four years. She is looking forward to serving her community as school trustee.



## Sophie Fontaine - Trustee (District of Elkford)

Sophie lives in Elkford with her husband, their two daughters, and their border collie. Since moving to Elkford, she and her family have been warmly welcomed into the community. She enjoys spending time with her family, running, biking, hiking, dancing, yoga, and travelling, particularly to Whistler and Montana.

Sophie has a diverse background in education, social services, and disability support. She has worked as a Behaviour Therapy Assistant, Educational Assistant, and Disability Case Manager. Her educational qualifications include a Psychology degree, a Social Service Worker Diploma, and an Interior Design Certificate. During her high school and post-secondary years, Sophie worked as a camp counsellor and respite worker, along with various positions in retail. Growing up with deaf parents, she used sign language as her primary form of communication. She also enjoys creating personalized and customized items using a vinyl cutter.

Through her professional experience, Sophie understands both the day-to-day realities of modern classrooms and the administrative responsibilities involved in managing student support systems. As a school trustee, she is committed to listening, asking thoughtful questions, and supporting the needs of all learners. Sophie believes in ensuring classrooms have the resources necessary to support every student, including special education services, early intervention, and enrichment opportunities for gifted and advanced learners. She values building strong relationships with families across the education community, including those involved in public schools, alternative programs, and homeschooling, so parents feel heard and supported. She looks forward to working alongside parents, educators, and the community to support schools, encourage the effective use of resources, and help ensure every student has the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed.

## Nicole Heckendorf - Trustee (City of Fernie)



Nicole has been an active member of the PAC at both École Isabella Dicken Elementary School (EIDES) and Fernie Secondary (FSS) since 2011. She served as Parent Advisory Chair at EIDES from 2016-2021 and FSS Vice Chair from 2020-2022. Nicole worked as an emergency Southeast Kootenay School District employee in a variety of roles including noon-hour supervisor, secretary, education assistant, and Teacher Teaching on Call (TTOC) prior to joining the Board of Education in 2022. She is looking forward to representing Fernie on the Board of Education for a second term and hopes to build on the relationships and experience she gained during her first term.

Nicole grew up in London, Ontario, received her Bachelor of Physical Education from McMaster University in 1995 and moved out west in 2000. She enjoyed a successful ten-year career working in pharmaceutical sales with Eli Lilly Canada before moving to Fernie in 2009 with her husband Dennis and their three children. Nicole enjoys hiking and biking, coaching youth basketball and is an active volunteer in the community.

# Introducing
# THE BOARD OF EDUCATION 2026–2030

## Chris Johns - Trustee (City of Cranbrook - Electoral Area C)



Chris has been a teacher for more than 36 years with successful teaching experience at the elementary, junior and senior secondary grades. He had teaching assignments in Fort Nelson, Port Alberni, and, for the last 28 years, in Cranbrook prior to his retirement in June of 2008. In Cranbrook he taught at the upper elementary level with teaching assignments at Steeples and Amy Woodland. He had two terms as the President of the Cranbrook District Teachers' Association, one in the late 1980s for two years, followed by his most recent term of 11 years that concluded in June 2008 with his retirement from active teaching.

Chris has also been a student-teacher supervisor for the University of Victoria/College of the Rockies Teachers' Education Program for six years giving him experience with entry-level students becoming professional educators.

Together with his wife Carol, also a teacher and early childhood advocate, they are long-term residents of Cranbrook with both of their children, Jenn and Steve, being successful graduates of the Cranbrook public school system and Mount Baker. The Johns family were also a Kootenay Ice Billet Family for 10 years and are presently Season Ticket holders with the Cranbrook Bucks.

In his extensive experience he's witnessed firsthand the importance of the advocacy and engagement by parents and stakeholders for decision-making that is based on the best interests of students that reflects their individual educational needs.



## Allie Kostiuk - Trustee (City of Cranbrook - Electoral Area C)

Allie (she/her) is a parent of two elementary-aged boys and a teacher for the University of Victoria East Kootenay Teacher Education Program. She has worked in both the Southeast Kootenay School District and Rocky Mountain School District as a teacher of grades 2-3, elementary music, and technology. She currently teaches reading and technology courses for UVic, working closely with local schools, teachers, and students. In addition to this role, Allie is also a UVic field advisor for teacher candidates on practicum as well as a support and educator for mentor teachers.

Born and raised in the Kootenays, Allie has lived in Cranbrook for the past 15 years. She holds a Bachelor of Education (UVic, 2011) and a Master's in Educational Technology (UBC, 2017). She has coaching certification and experience in gymnastics and basketball, and believes that sports and the arts are essential components of child development.

Allie is committed to fostering safe, inclusive schools and classrooms that engage all learners, including those with diverse needs. She is passionate about literacy, social and emotional learning (mental health), environmental education, and educational technology.

Allie brings both parent and educator perspectives to help make informed, student-centred decisions that stay current on education trends and issues.

## District of Sparwood Trustee Vacancy

The trustee position representing the District of Sparwood is currently vacant. Information regarding the by-election will be shared when available.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Board of Education meets the second Tuesday of every month (except July and August) and the public is always welcome! The meetings start at 3:00 p.m. If you prefer to attend virtually, please email for a meeting link (jane.nixon@sd5.bc.ca). Agendas and meeting locations are posted on the website at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

# Indigenous Education

## National Indigenous Veterans Day and Remembrance Day Ceremony

Laurie Middle School students, staff and community members came together for a meaningful assembly honouring Indigenous Veterans Day and Remembrance Day.

The assembly provided an opportunity to pause, reflect and remember the courage, dedication and sacrifices of those who served Canada during times of war and conflict, while also recognizing the important contributions and sacrifices of Indigenous veterans. As part of the ceremony, students recited In Flanders Fields in Ktunaxa, English and French. A poem written by Anne Jimmy and a heartfelt tribute to veterans were also shared. Students participated in reading the names of veterans who served our country, paying tribute to their service, courage and sacrifice.

The assembly was a meaningful reminder of the importance of remembrance, gratitude and honouring those who have served.





## Mount Baker Secondary Warriors Leadership

Students from the Mount Baker Warriors leadership class spent two days working alongside Blue Lake Camp on a hands-on restoration project along Joseph Creek near Mount Nelson.

As part of the project, students planted trees along a section of the creek, contributing to local environmental restoration efforts while gaining valuable experience in environmental stewardship and community service.



## Truth and Reconciliation Assemblies

The annual Truth and Reconciliation assemblies at Mount Baker Secondary included Parkland and Laurie Middle schools. Thank you to the organizers, Indigenous Education Council members, Elders, Sookenai Singers and to the students.





# News from District Teachers

## District Literacy Teacher, Laura-Lee Phillips

Great literacy learning is happening at Pinewood Elementary. Across the classrooms, teachers are using small-group instruction to help students strengthen their reading and writing skills through focused teaching that meets learners where they are.

### Why small groups?

Small groups give students more opportunities to practise, ask questions, share their thinking, and receive immediate feedback. They also allow teachers to listen closely, identify what students are ready to learn next, and plan instruction based on individual strengths and needs.

Depending on the learning goal, students may be working on connecting letters and sounds to read and spell words, building reading accuracy and fluency, developing vocabulary and comprehension, or strengthening their ideas and written expression.

An important part of small-group instruction is that groups are flexible. Students may work with different classmates at different times depending on the skill being taught and the support or challenge they need. As students grow, their groups can change too. The goal is to provide the right instruction at the right time while helping students become increasingly confident and independent readers and writers.



Small groups, meaningful learning!

### How can families help?

Families can support literacy learning at home in simple ways. Read together, talk about favourite books and stories, and encourage your child to write for everyday purposes such as making a list, writing a note, or keeping a journal. You might also ask, “What are you practising as a reader or writer right now?”



**Most importantly, celebrate your child’s effort, growth, and progress.**

We are proud of the literacy learning happening at Pinewood Elementary and grateful for our partnership with families. Together, we can help every child continue to grow as a confident reader and writer.



# News from District Teachers

## District Numeracy Teacher, Nicole Fulton

This month, 24 elementary teachers from across the District came together in Fernie for the first of three sessions in our K–6 Numeracy Cohort with Kendra Jacobs. The day was filled with opportunities to explore mathematical ideas, engage in hands-on learning, and collaborate with colleagues.



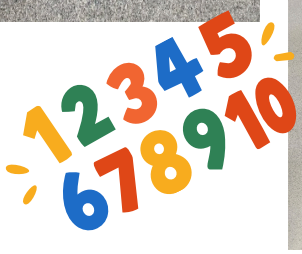
Kendra's approach focuses on building mathematical understanding through curiosity, exploration, and meaningful conversations. A big part of her work is helping teachers rediscover the joy of mathematics so they can bring that same excitement and confidence into their classrooms. Throughout the day, teachers had time to try activities, share ideas, and think about how to bring these experiences into their own classrooms. If you're interested in learning more about Kendra and her work, check out her website, Mathematizing 24/7.



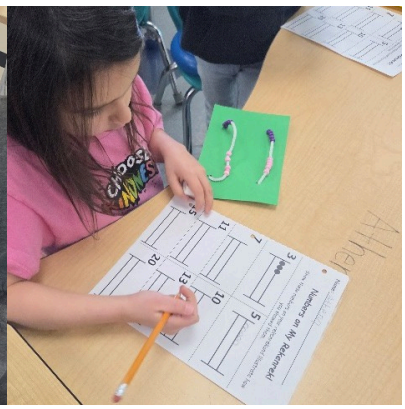
In October, teachers in grades five to nine also came together for our Middle Years Numeracy Day, exploring ways to develop mathematical reasoning through the work of Pam Harris. The focus was on building flexible thinking, recognizing number relationships, and helping students move beyond memorized procedures toward deeper mathematical understanding.

Classroom collaborations continue across the district, with teachers and students exploring number sense, mathematical reasoning, and hands-on learning through games, routines, and manipulatives. It has been wonderful to see these ideas come to life in classrooms.







# News from Learning Services

## Director Kaley Wasylowich

### Meet Trina and Rianne




Our School Psychologists partner with students, families, and school teams throughout SD5 to support learning, well-being, and inclusion. Through assessment, consultation, and collaborative problem-solving, they help schools better understand and respond to the diverse strengths and needs of learners across the District.





### District Swim Program

The District Swim Program helps students develop water safety awareness, swimming skills, and confidence through inclusive, skill-based instruction. This valuable opportunity supports physical literacy, personal growth, and lifelong participation in active living.



### Social Emotional Learning (SEL)



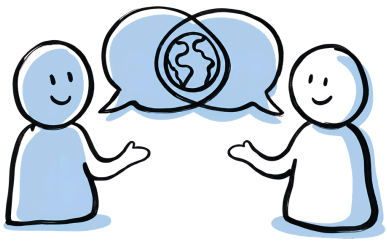






Grade one students at Frank J Mitchell Elementary were developing their SEL competencies of social awareness and group decision making by collaborating on building ladybug houses. Students planned and worked with a partner and then shared with the class in a gallery walk.

Students at Frank J Mitchell Elementary tackled a design challenge, while building their group decision-making and collaboration skills when they tried to build the tallest paper tower using 10 pieces of paper and 30 centimetres of tape. These amazing students also worked to find a way to have everyone's ideas reflected in the finished product!

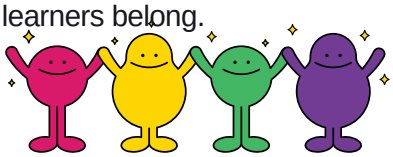


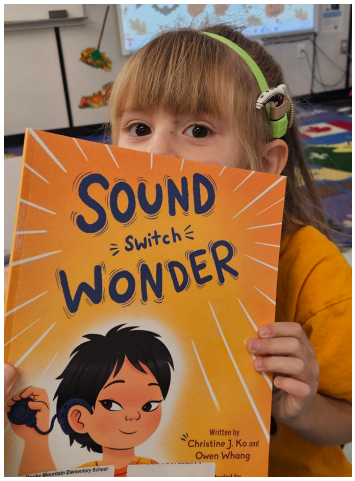


### Home Languages - A Powerful Asset

Encouraging English language learners (ELLs) to use their home languages helps create a welcoming, inclusive environment where students feel safe to participate, take risks, and share their ideas. Research also shows that maintaining and using home languages supports academic achievement, deeper understanding of complex concepts, critical thinking, and stronger family engagement.

It is inspiring to see classrooms across the District embracing students' linguistic diversity and creating spaces where all learners belong.






### Reading Stories with DHH Characters

For Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) students, books featuring DHH characters help foster identity, belonging, and self-confidence by allowing them to see themselves reflected in stories. These books also help hearing students build empathy, inclusion, and an appreciation for diverse ways of communicating and experiencing the world.

**Recommended reads for school libraries and classroom read-alouds:**

- Ada and the Helpers – Travis D. Peterson
- M19: The Beginning – Adam Rood
- El Deafo – Cece Bell
- Wonderstruck – Brian Selznick
- A Song for a Whale – Lynne Kelly



# OUTDOOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## Take Me Outside Day

Take Me Outside Day was enjoyed on October 21 in many schools, including École Isabella Dicken Elementary.



Awesome!

## Mount Baker Secondary Environmental Awareness Program

Students in the Mount Baker Environmental Awareness Program explored Columbia Lake by canoe over three days in October. Students observed ancient and modern geological features, including dolostone bedrock, groundwater springs, and silty banks left behind by a glacial lake. They explored the important role of beavers as ecosystem engineers, and deepened their understanding of the cultural geography of the area through learning about (and walking) the Spirit Trail, the Ktunaxa Creation Story, and traditional sturgeon-nosed canoes.







# IN THE SCHOOLS

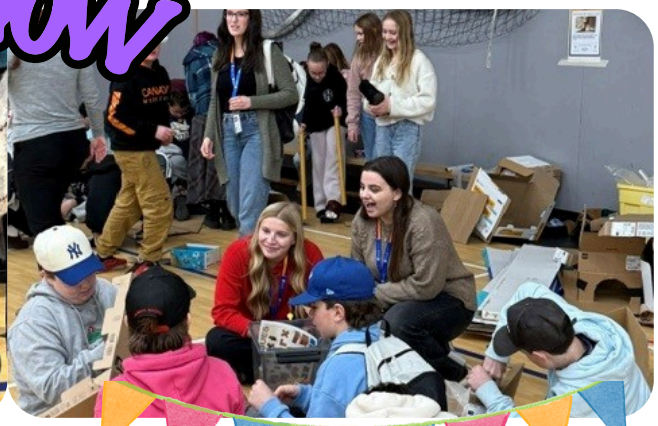
## News from Schools Across the District

### Gordon Terrace Elementary Innovation Hour

Gordon Terrace Elementary was buzzing with excitement during the annual Innovation Hour! All 275 students, along with staff, participated in activities that encouraged critical thinking, teamwork, and collaboration. Students eagerly explored challenges and shared ideas, filling the school with happy, smiling faces and enthusiasm for learning.

Thank you to the UVic Teacher Education Program, with upwards of 30 volunteers helping to make this event possible. Thank you, Allie Kostiuk, Ryan McKenzie and everyone who contributed to an engaging and memorable hour of innovation!






### Kootenay Orchards Elementary Garden Harvest

Mrs. Schadeli's grade 4/5 class at Kootenay Orchards Elementary took turns with different roles in harvesting the kale from the garden to make kale chips.

Students picked, washed, de-stemmed, massaged, seasoned, and then baked the kale to make tasty and healthy chips. There was so much kale this year that they donated some to Community Connections which has been adding the chopped kale into our District Hot Lunch program on Thursdays.



# A Picture Says a Thousand Words...



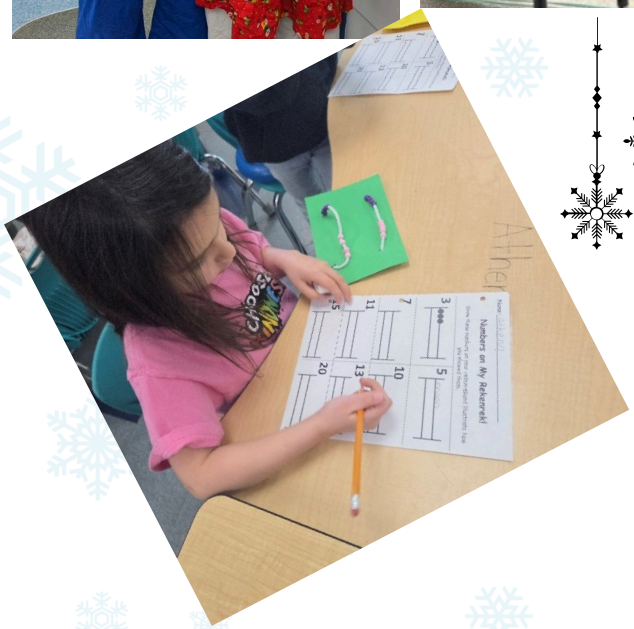












EAST KOOTENAY HERITAGE FAIR

# 2026-2027

**May 6, 7 and 8, 2027**



# EAST KOOTENAY HERITAGE FAIR

**The Heritage Fair is an amazing opportunity for students to get curious, creative, and confident with Canadian History!**



**Open to all students in grades 4-10 in SD5!**

## Register your class!

**Teachers have until Jan. 29 to register.**

REGISTER NOW

**More Info:**

www.cranbrookhistorycentre.com/learn/heritage-fair