



Vancouver School District

School Plan for Southlands Elementary

Year 1 of 3 Year Plan, 2020 - 2021

1. **GENERAL SCHOOL STORY** (TO BE UPDATED EACH YEAR)

Our school is situated on the edge of Pacific Spirit Park in the Dunbar/Southlands neighbourhood of Vancouver, on the unceded and traditional lands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people.

Our school has the privilege of being the catchment school for the members of the Musqueam community. Thirty-one percent of our students identify as Indigenous and most of these students reside on the Musqueam reserve. The Southlands staff is committed to bringing Indigenous knowledge, language and culture to all students with the support of parents, caregivers and Elders. Many items of art created by Musqueam weavers, carvers and printmakers are displayed in the halls of the school. Two years ago, the school was honoured to be given a Musqueam flag which stands proudly in front of the office along with the flags of Vancouver, British Columbia and Canada.

Currently, we are the only public school in Vancouver with the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program, K-7. Southlands has been an authorized IB school since 2013. All of the enrolling teachers and most of the non-enrolling teachers hold the Level 1 PYP Certificate. Students in the PYP program are given many opportunities to practice acts of local and global citizenship, to participate in transdisciplinary learning and to share their learning in a wide variety of ways. Students are instructed in French from K – 7. We celebrate the intellectual achievement of students through Exhibitions of Learning.

We currently have 225 students enrolled. Twenty-six percent of our students are learning English as an additional language. There are fifteen different home languages spoken. Fifteen percent of the students have a ministry designation indicating a special need. Approximately 20% of our students are “out of catchment” and come to Southlands for the IB PYP program.

2. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT OUR COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS?

(SCANNING)

In scanning our school, we have noticed that many students have a level of confidence that gives them the ability to speak publicly in French and English, to plan and organize fundraisers for various causes, and to creatively represent their learning through art, drama, poetry, story, dance, as well as by traditional means such as essay and PowerPoint presentation.

In examining the results of the 2019 Student Learning Survey (the most recent), staff observed that many students felt they are able to get help with their learning, they feel cared for, they work collaboratively, feel safe at school, and see cultural and gender diversity represented and respected. Areas that students felt were needing improvement were access to technology, knowledge of Indigenous language and culture, and having choice in what they are learning.

In order for those areas to improve, staff have committed to learning more about what Indigenous knowledge and language we can respectfully and authentically share by making connections with parents, caregivers and Elders at Musqueam. Three teachers and the principal have submitted a Project on this topic to the Network of Inquiry and Indigenous Education.

The learning and work we will describe here began in January 2020.

3. WHAT EVIDENCE SUPPORTS WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT OUR LEARNERS?

(SCANNING)

During the months of April, May and June 2020, because of the global pandemic, our staff began to wonder about how to engage our community and create a strong sense of community and belonging, despite that fact that many students were not attending school in person. We began to think and talk as a staff about what we could do to make school more relevant and more reflective of the cultural diversity that we have at Southlands. The district's emphasis on **Connection** inspired this conversation.

When asked, "What is the understanding around allyship and collective responsibility at your school?" Staff responded:

- Be authentic. Encourage Indigenous voices. Be open to making mistakes
- Be in good relations with yourself and others
- Recognize students' gifts
- Nurture a sense of community
- Build relationships and collaborate
- Give students a voice

We further strengthened our commitment to community during the June 2020 Professional Development Day when staff committed to move forward by developing new units of inquiry for September based on the central idea that "Building community creates a sense of belonging." This included an exploration of the concepts of identity and reconciliation. They asked the following inquiry questions:

- What do you need to feel like you belong?
- How can we create a classroom community where we all feel like we belong?
- How can we create a school community where we all feel like we belong?
- How does a sense of belonging affect our ability to learn and do our best?
- How can we intentionally implement the First Peoples Principles of Learning?

Teaching during a pandemic has made us to consider our priorities in providing an educational program. We believe that before we are able to help our students develop the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed for twenty-first century global citizenship, we must ensure that they have a sense of belonging and believe that they are valued members of our school community whose strengths are honoured and nurtured. We committed to **Belonging** as our new school goal in the fall of 2020.

4. WHAT IS THE FOCUS FOR OUR COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS BASED ON THE EVIDENCE? (FOCUSING)

The focus of our school plan is to build and maintain a community in which **all members** feel that they belong.

We believe that we can also build bridges of belonging with the greater school community including the parents, caregivers and extended families of our students.

Our focus is aligned with the **district strategic plan** in many ways, including:

Goal 1: Engage our learners through innovative teaching and learning practices.

- Provide increased opportunities to connect students to their learning.
- Enhance support for students with specific needs.
- Support the implementation of the curriculum.
- Enhance assessment and reporting strategies to support teaching and learning.
- Ensure Indigenous students achieve increased academic success in Vancouver schools and that they participate fully and successfully from kindergarten through the completion of Grade 12.

Goal 3: Create a culture of care and shared social responsibility.

- Ensure school communities are safe spaces where racism and discrimination will not be tolerated.
- Encourage and enhance practices that support cultural, emotional, physical and mental well-being.
- Support effective, thoughtful transitions for all students at each stage of their development.
- Increase Indigenous students' sense of pride, self-esteem, belonging, place, acceptance and caring in their schools.
- Increase knowledge, awareness, appreciation of, and respect for Indigenous histories, traditions, cultures and contributions by all students through eliminating institutional, cultural and individual racism within the Vancouver school district learning communities.
- Respect and celebrate all forms of diversity.
- Support collaborative relationships with community partners that enhance student learning and well-being.

Our focus is also aligned with the district Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement's focus on Belonging, Mastery, Culture and Community. In particular, we are committed to increasing Aboriginal students', indeed all students', "sense of pride, self-esteem, belonging, place, acceptance and caring" at Southlands.

Our focus interconnects with many of the Big Ideas of the BC Curriculum, as well as with the Core Competency of Personal and Social Awareness and Responsibility in which "students value diversity, defend human rights, advocate for issues, and interact ethically with others. They are inclusive in their language and behaviour and recognize that everyone has something to contribute. Their approach to inclusive relationships exemplifies commitment to developing positive communities."

Our focus is aligned with all of the IB Learner Profile Attributes, but particularly Caring, Principled and Open-minded.

As we guide our students' learning in this area, we are also committed to the adults' learning through professional developments days, Staff Meetings, Book Clubs, the openness of committees such as the Code of Conduct Review Committee, the International Baccalaureate Pedagogical Leadership Committee,

the FuturePlay Committee, the Network of Inquiry and Indigenous Education Committee and the Indigenous Education Committee.

5. **INQUIRY QUESTION** (FOCUSING)

Our inquiry question is: If we focus on building community and a sense of belonging and provide authentic learning experiences that are relevant to our students, will we see increased engagement in learning?

We will use primarily street level data (Safir, 2021): anecdotes, stories, interviews, as well as:

- Student Learning Survey results and other survey results
- Attendance Data
- Anecdotes of student engagement in classroom or school projects
- Anecdotes from parents and caregivers

During the 2019-2020 school year, Southlands staff met monthly to examine different data sources, to compare our values and priorities, to build some common understanding, and to discuss our strengths and areas for growth as a school. We also used anecdotal evidence of belonging and engagements, trends and patterns in student behaviour. We identified reading, writing and numeracy as areas needing attention, but at the foundation of learning must be a sense of safety and belonging.

We believe that the most important work we can do is to make our school a safe place to learn physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe.

We believe that by using a strengths-based approach with each student, recognizing and appreciating them for who they are and the gifts they bring, we will foster a sense of safety and belonging, culture and identity.

6. **WHAT IS OUR PLAN?** (PLANNING)

As a staff, we recognize our need to learn more about the community-building process.

During the 2020 – 2021 school year, our focus will be on **Connection**. In particular, we will maintain our connections with students and their families despite the pandemic. We will do this by becoming nimble with Microsoft teams, the District CSL tool, and by working with our in-class students to maintain and strengthen students' individual strengths identities and cultures. Our new Student Leadership Club meets weekly to plan school spirit days and other events like food drives for the Vancouver Food Bank. Our Student Safety Patrol has twenty committed members who reliably show up for crosswalk duty each week. We have also begin to build connections with people in the community, such as the Musqueam Language Department, filmmakers and innovators introduced to us through the FuturePlay project, and organizations that our school supports, such as the UBC International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program Cohort. We have also made connections with seniors at an assisted living home and value these intergenerational relationships.

Despite the pandemic, we will stay connected to families through regular newsletters, email and social media. We also have a collaborative staff/parent committee who work together organizing and maintaining the school gardens. The PAC has helped us form a partnership with SPEC: the Society Promoting Environmental Conservation.

In years 2 and 3, we will rescan the school community and consult with students and families to determine our next steps. Many things we would like to do are not possible during the pandemic.

7. WHAT SUPPORTS WILL WE NEED? (PLANNING)

- Professional development in the First Peoples Principles of Learning and trauma-informed practices
- Increased professional resources available to staff, such as [The Power of Inquiry](#), by Kath Murdoch, [Making Thinking Visible](#), by Richhart, Church and Morrison, [Teaching to Strengths](#) by Zacarian et al, and the [Walking Curriculum](#) by Gillian Judson.
- More authentic texts written by Indigenous authors for the school library
- Community connections with experts in various fields: Inquiry, Indigenous Education, Social Emotional Learning, School gardening and Indigenous plants

8. HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'RE ON TRACK? (CHECKING)

We will use the following types of evidence:

- Student Learning Survey results and other survey results
- Attendance Data
- Anecdotes of student engagement in classroom or school projects
- Anecdotes from parents and caregivers

For example:

A student new to our school told his parents, “It is much easier making friends at Southlands than it was at my old school.”

Two siblings who enrolled at our school because their catchment school was full chose to remain at Southlands, even though space opened up at their catchment school.

The PAC decided to pay for every students and staff member to receive a new Southlands school shirt upon return to in-person instruction this school year. Every Friday we all wear our Southlands shirts with the Musqueam-designed logo, with great pride.

9. **HOW WILL WE SHARE THIS INFORMATION?** (CHECKING)

This information will be shared at staff meetings, PAC meetings, in school and PAC newsletters, and on our school website. We also share performances and information sessions via Teams and YouTube when appropriate.



District-wide Indigenous Focus (worldviews): To increase knowledge, acceptance, empathy, awareness and appreciation of Indigenous histories, traditions, cultures and contributions among all learners.

10. WHAT LEARNING HAVE WE DONE AT OUR SCHOOL TO SUPPORT AND ENHANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS AND KNOWLEDGE?

We:

- Acknowledge territory every morning on our Morning Announcements.
- Plan assemblies with Indigenous speakers, drummers, dancers, story tellers.
- Invite guest speakers from Musqueam, to share Indigenous traditions and ways of knowing
- Invited two Elders and their grandson conduct a traditional cedar sweeping of the school
- Had full staff participation in two Indigenous Focus Days
- Planned fieldtrips to the Camosun Bog with GVRD staff to learn about the stories and science of the Bog
- Conducted inquiry around the life cycle of the salmon and release fry into the Musqueam Creek
- Taught senior classes traditional Métis beading
- Met with representatives of the Musqueam Language Department to discuss ways to bring hənq̓əmiñəm to Southlands
- Met regularly with the Musqueam Education Department to discuss how we can better support students
- Use plant identification cards / books in the forest to learn more about traditional / medicinal uses and names in local Indigenous languages
- For every unit, teachers complete a section in the PYP planner that describes connections to Indigenous content and First People's Principles of Learning
- Submitted an inquiry question to NOIIE: If we bring more authentic Indigenous learning experiences to our school, we will see increased student attendance and engagement?
- Participated in a Coast Salish weaving virtual lesson with an Elder from the Squamish Nation.

11. WHAT EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING OF INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS AND KNOWLEDGE HAVE BEEN FOSTERED WITHIN YOUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY? PLEASE SHARE HOW IT IS EMBEDDED THROUGHOUT.

- Indigenous art and artifacts, Musqueam flag displayed in the school
- In-person and guest speakers via Teams speaking on topics such as Residential schools, community and governance.
- Indigenous author visits
- Assemblies with Indigenous singers, dancers, storytellers
- Teaching of Indigenous art forms such as Métis beading, Musqueam cedar weaving, wool weaving
- School logo designed by Musqueam artist, displayed widely
- Nurturing relationships with the families of the students and engaging them in their child's educational journey
- Use of restorative circle processes for conflict resolution and community-building
- Display of and conversation about the First Peoples Principals of Learning
- Regular conversation with staff and students about why we need to foster an understanding of Indigenous world views and knowledge. *If not here, where? If not now, when?*

12. HOW WILL WE SUSTAIN AND ENHANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE AND KNOWLEDGE?

- Purchase more resources by Indigenous authors for the library
- Invite Indigenous speakers from a variety of regions, as not all of our Indigenous students are from Musqueam
- School-wide professional development to explore ways to authentically incorporate FPPL
- Maintain new relationship with members of the Musqueam Language department so a sustainable working partnership is developed
- Continue to attend the VSB Indigenous Allies and Leads meetings