

A CASE FOR SECONDARY REVISIONING IN SD 10 (ARROW LAKES)



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Presented to The Inaugural Think Tank:
Imagining the Futures of Small Secondary Schools
SD 10 (Arrow Lakes)
“Global Learning in a Rural Setting”
www.sd10.bc.ca

**Nakusp Secondary School, Lucerne Elementary-Secondary School,
Arrow Lakes Distributed Learning School**

Three small rural secondary schools with a lotta heart,, a passel of great people, and a reputation for innovative practice in one tiny rural district.

ReVisioning Together = Hope and Possibility

A CASE FOR SECONDARY REVISIONING IN SD 10 (ARROW LAKES)

MOVING FROM GOOD TO GREAT

I. A brief introduction to School District 10

We're known by...

- The district is known across the province as a place birthing and leading in innovative rural education practices. Our district motto is “global learning in a rural setting” and we aim for that vision.
- **Place-conscious learning**, dynamic and collaborative *online learning*, engineering creative solutions for declining enrollment, thoughtfully structured **multi-grade classrooms** and **school-community connections**, a *growing culture of teacher and student inquiry*, **inclusion for all** in Aboriginal and Special Education, **achievement** in team and individual sports, **excellent graduation rates for all learners**, and performance on student assessments at or above the provincial average, strong *graduates who capture top national awards and scholarships*, – these are all hallmarks of the good work we are known for across the Kootenays and BC
- Geography rules: 6 schools (5 neighbourhood schools and one DL school) are dispersed across hundreds of km of mountains and lakes. Our geography is a strong asset for environmental learning; and a significant challenge for district coherence, transportation and travel.



- There are just over 500 students, 40 teachers, 14 Education Assistants, 4 principals, a District Principal, and a Superintendent/Secretary-Treasurer. **Just about everyone wears at least two - if not five or more - hats.**
- An itinerant school psychologist, occupational therapist, speech-language therapist, a teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing are hired on small contracts to serve students with Special Needs.

Student-Led Conferences



There is much discussion these days about how to educate BC students for the 21st century, some of it focusing on ways to help students become more responsible for their own learning. These thoughtful and well-produced videos from the Lucerne Elementary and Secondary schools in New Denver, BC offer powerful examples of student voice and the possibilities for “personalized learning” at the heart of the culture of a small rural school. [Learn more.](#)

Lucerne: A Culture of Writing



There are just under a hundred K-12 students at Lucerne School in New Denver, a picturesque and historic village on Shuswap Lake in the southeast corner of BC. For the students, teachers and Principal at Lucerne have created, along with guest authors and community members, a “culture of passionate writers” that is larger than life. [Learn more.](#)

Online Literature Circles



Here you will find a wealth of materials developed for the stimulation of the literary imagination...often over long distances! [Learn More.](#)

Telling the Stories of the Nikkei



In a powerful example of a collaborative inquiry, teachers Terry Taylor and Gary Parkstrom and students in social studies and english at Lucerne Secondary School worked with film makers. [Learn More.](#)

SCREENSHOT FROM WWW.RURALTEACHERS.COM

- Travel in the winter can be treacherous.

Three vastly different secondary schools, each serving their own communities:

Intensely beautiful, rural,

- **Nakusp Secondary School** – projected 2013-14 enrollment of 153 students in Grade 8-12
 - NSS currently operates on a 5x 8 rotating block timetable
 - A full slate of electives ranging from Carpentry and Welding to Visual Art are offered; more and more the school is looking at multi-graded alternatives
 - Team teaching in the Musical Theatre program and growing interest in collaborative inquiry and examining 21st century learning
 - School sports is an area of strength ranging from achievement in Soccer, Basketball, Ski and Snowboard and Golf
 - The school has a Facilitated Learning Centre where about 20% of students from Grades 9-12 work on online BCLN courses in a blended learning environment
- **Lucerne Elementary Secondary School** – projected enrollment in 2013-14 of 27 students
 - Lucerne is a K-12 school of 97 students located in New Denver, about 40 minutes south of Nakusp. The school is also home to a StrongStart Centre and preschool.
 - Current timetable is a 5x5, non-rotating block timetable
 - In order to offer more choice, Lucerne initiated the *Fall and Spring into Learning* program 12 years ago. Regular classes halt each fall and spring and students choose a 4-5 day experiential learning path, pursuing passions ranging from *Small Motor Repairs* to *Paddling, Painting and Poetry* or *Mountains as Teachers*
 - Cross-curricular learning has been successfully integrated over the past five years in week-long whole school field trips, immersion place-conscious documentary filmmaking, and online literature and information circles in collaboration with other schools in BC
 - All Grade 10-12 students work in the Facilitated Learning Centre on one or more online or blended learning courses
- **Arrow Lakes DL School** – projected enrollment in 2013-14 of 12 secondary students; 5 FTE
 - There are two “sites” for this small DL School each staffed with a .2 teacher
 - In Nakusp: a storefront school co-located in the ABE classroom at Selkirk College’s Nakusp Centre, serving 15-19 year olds and non-graduated adult learners
 - In New Denver: a small co-located presence at Lucerne School in New Denver, serving K-9 DL home-based learners and distance ed secondary learners, and non-graduated adults from the New Denver area
 - Student success is linked to small groups, one-to-one attention, and flexibility in meeting student needs. Courses are delivered online through BCLN Moodle CMS
 - Both NSS and Lucerne are highly supportive of DL students cross-enrolling and encourage DL School graduates to participate in school graduation ceremonies
- Enrollment in the district has declined almost 50% in the past 30 years: from 1000 students in 1983 to 500 students in 2013.
- Students and families with Special Needs who move to our district often comment on how much more inclusion and support happens in SD 10 due to smaller classes and highly supportive staff

- Our Board of Education's Strategic Planning Retreat - January 2013 – identified that our biggest asset was our staff, our people, our communities.
- Those of us in the field, identify that one of our biggest assets is our Board of Education who truly care about children and learning. All decisions are made through the lens of what is best for kids.
- **Historically, the district has experienced and been the site of much conflict, and yet always persisted:**
 - Situated on contested land, the district lies on traditional territory of the Sinixt Nation who were declared extinct in 1956 for the purposes of the Indian Act; land was used by Kutenai, Okanagan, and Shuswap Nations; current land claims by the Ktunaxa Nation and the Okanagan Alliance
 - European settlers first came in the late 1800's as a result of the silver rush, and worked in the logging and mining industries. The history of the area shows continual cycles of boom and bust with a base population of settlers remaining stable in the major communities over time.
 - At the turn of the century and through to the 1960s, Doukhobor families sought to find peace from persecution in our valleys. Many elders and families in all of our communities maintain the values of “toil and a peaceful life” – the Doukhobor motto. In the 1960s, Doukhobor children were interned in a residential school located in New Denver. (www.valuesofdoukhoborcommunity.wordpress.com - 2011 project)
 - In 1942, 1400 Japanese Canadians were interned in New Denver, Sandon, Rosebery in the south-eastern part of the district. (www.tellingthestoriesofthenikkei.wordpress.com - 2009 place-conscious learning project incorporating student inquiries in documentary film and professional interviews with Japanese Canadian elders)
 - In the 1960s the Columbia River was flooded and hundreds of families in the area lost their livelihoods, their farms, orchards and homes to provide power for the US. The Arrow Lakes (home to the communities of Edgewood, Burton, Nakusp) is a reservoir for the Columbia Basin.
 - In the 1960s, thousands of Vietnam war resisters fled to the Arrow Lakes and Slocan Valley communities in our district to make a better life for themselves and their families.
 - Our district is one of the few rural districts that were not amalgamated in 1988. We are too small, too expensive to operate from central offices hundreds of kilometers away, and no one wanted us.
 - To be honest, the district values its autonomy and we didn't want to be amalgamated either...
 - It's hard to be so small, but it's good too...

II. Key Concepts

Challenges...

- Though the district remains under funding protection, we struggle yet continue to provide high quality learning faced with ever-decreasing enrollment, more and more complex class configurations, and shrinking staff. In four of the five district schools, every grade is multi-graded.
- Though there are very significant “pockets of brilliance”, 21st century learning practices are not yet a way of life across the district in all of our schools or all of our secondary schools.
- Sometimes when great pedagogical practices are in place, parents and community clamour for more traditional educational experiences and threaten to move their children.
- We have an ongoing need to educate our public, all our staff, and our communities about why we are doing what we are doing – about the urgency for educational change and embracing 21st century learning.
- Yet --- our resources (time and energy) are limited –who will do that job???? is a frequent question.
- Our local economy is in bad shape – clearly a “bust” part of the boom-bust cycle. Poverty is very significant. Unemployment is at about 14% currently, with many families having to split up with one partner leaving the area to find work while the other maintains family and household. Property tax assessments in some communities dropped as much as 22% this past year.
- The impact on our children is intense: more and more children and youth are in crisis, dealing with mental health or addiction issues, demonstrating significant challenges in self-regulation in the classroom

Assets...

- Each of our three “secondary schools” has a unique character responsive to its community of learners
- High interest in voluntary professional learning is a strength – for the past five years 40% of teachers participated in one or more district professional learning team ranging from Collaborative Inquiry (district-based, NOII or AESN), CR4YR primary reading team, District Literacy team, Collaborating to Support All Learners with Leyton Schnellert, etc)
- 100% Board of Education support for making our district the best it can be to serve the needs of children
- A committed district Leadership Team works collaboratively to solve problems, share resources, and share the workload
- Every principal also wears some district hat which helps distribute leadership and increase awareness of the whole district
- Teacher leadership is valued and increasingly nurtured
- Relationship between the teachers’ union, support staff union and the district is excellent and supports learning for children and professionals alike

- Our district leadership in initiating and facilitating online cross-district collaborations is significant – and our students benefit by “connecting” with learners outside their own schools and communities. Teacher professional learning is also fostered in these collaborative projects.

III. Narrative – Story of a district at a crossroads

So, what shall we do?

I write from the perspective of SD 10’s District Principal of Learning, and I tell you we are in the spot where what we have been doing, no longer quite works. Initially it was pressure at Lucerne School in New Denver, 15 years ago that forced secondary school change. Declining enrollment in the mid 1990s, led to establishing a Facilitated Learning Centre (FLC) in the school to address the needs of a shrinking population of high school students. Online learning was birthed in the district at Lucerne School as one of six NDDL (New Directions in Distance Learning) sites across BC. Adult learners formed part of the school learning community in a truly DL-neighbourhood school partnership.

Since that time in the 1990s, enrollment has decreased at Lucerne by almost 50% and the blended learning methods in the FLC that worked for a decade, and were seen at the time as highly innovative and leading edge, are now no longer viable. Parents and students don’t want education to be “in front of a computer”. How can you run a secondary program that next year will have only 7 students in Grades 11 and 12??? Lucerne is a small school which has had to innovate to stay alive and in the constraint of small, has won much acclaim for its highly flexible, innovative, nimble and outside-the-box approaches to education. *Fall and Spring into Learning*, cross-curricular experiential learning, school-community partnerships, a personalized and valued Work Experience program – all remain strengths and great pedagogical practice, but it’s not enough. For years it’s been impossible to have school dances (unless they are family and community dances) or to form sports teams (unless all the girls from Grade 5-12 play soccer). Now parents are talking about moving away or taking their children to Nakusp. Will the school stay open is a constant thread under the surface.

In 2009, the Arrow Lakes DL School started up to help capture students who were living in the area, but not in our schools. We brought 26 FTEs per year back into the district by listening carefully to parents, students and community, and offering flexible home-based DL support and a forging a co-location partnership with Selkirk College to provide a blended learning secondary program that supports at-risk and atypical learners. But it’s hard to predict from year to year if we will have any secondary learners. Our population of secondary and adult learners in the DL School rely on our flexibility. Hold your breath!!! It usually works out!!!

Nakusp Secondary, our largest secondary school, boasts a school population of 153 next year. It’s always been out of the line of fire for potential school closure and has had the luxury of single grade classes for many years. But that’s changing now. Not only in elective courses, but in core academic areas, we struggle to make the numbers work and multi-graded classes are becoming a necessity. Again, because NSS has not been impelled to change, it tends to be a more traditional high school. How do we move not just the early adopters who are embracing project-based learning, portfolios and inquiry, but *all* staff into 21st century learning??? How do we shift the culture of this school to align with the BC EdPlan visions?

Hosting our own Moodle site for the past 12 years has helped immensely as we can offer online BCLN courses, as well as develop our own courses to meet our students' needs in all three secondary schools – but --- when we look at 21st century learning skills, we worry about whether this is enough. How can we enhance online and blended learning to make it more relevant? How do we create competency-based, cross-curricular learning and meet all the DL School audit requirements based on a “course” system????

Our tiny district is doing its darndest. We're creative, hard-working and passionate. And we need your help!

IV. Positioning Questions

1. Should we bus the students from Lucerne to NSS? Should it be a one way or two way bus?
2. Should we maintain a K-12 school in New Denver with only 7 Grade 11/12 students?
3. What does education look like when there's only a handful of students in a high school?
4. How can our three schools work together more effectively to meet the needs of all?
5. How do we move a more traditional school forward to 21st century learning?
6. How can we appropriately staff three secondary schools with combined enrollment < 200 students?

V. References

- School District website at www.sd10.bc.ca (links to school websites)
- Examples of SD 10 Innovative work and Growing Innovation project at www.ruralteachers.com
- Fall 2013 AESN Research study by Dr. Catherine McGregor focused on SD 10 as one of two BC districts to case study as innovative leaders in Aboriginal Education Schools Network inquiry
- SD 10 secondary innovation work cited in *Becoming a History Education Teacher in Canada* (Farr-Darling and Taylor, University of Toronto Press, 2013), *Spirals of Inquiry* (Halbert and Kaser, BCPVPA, 2012), *It's All about Thinking* (Brownlie and Schnellert, Portage Press, 2009)

PLACE-BASED LEARNING:

Telling the Stories of the Nikkei (2008-09):

- The student films are showcased at www.tellingthestoriesofthenikkei.wordpress.com and www.thenhier.com and www.citizenshift.ca and www.ruralteachers.com (<http://www.ruralteachers.com/innovation/the-story-of-the-nikkei>)
- Touchstone Museum in Nelson showcased the films in November 2011; UBC Museum of Anthropology requested a copy of the DVD in June 2010 for their archives; ArtsStarts Gallery in Vancouver are showcasing the films from September 2012 till January 2013

- Further documentation at www.thenhier.ca/sites/default/files/Nikkei-Final-Report.pdf and www.slideshare.net/gueste885db/ubc-iop-conference-may-15-2010

Values of Doukhobor Community: Then and Now (2011-12):

- Student films are available at <http://www.ruralteachers.com/growing-innovation-2011> (project #2: SD 10 (Arrow Lakes) and at www.valuesofdoukhoborcommunity.wordpress.com
- <http://spirit-wrestlers.blogspot.ca/2011/10/doukhobor-documentaries-in-new-denver.html>

ONLINE LITERATURE CIRCLES:

- A chapter highlighting this innovative practice birthed at Lucerne School was published in Faye Brownlie and Leyton Snellert's book, *It's All About Thinking: Collaborating to Support All Learners in English and Social Studies* (Portage Press, 2009)
- www.ruralteachers.com/innovation

Numerous presentations on Online Literature Circles are available online including

- www.bcssa.org/pro-d/conf-present/LLA-Y6/online-lit-taylor.pdf
- www.bcpvpa.bc.ca/downloads/adminfo.../DysonAdminfo0211.pdf
- <http://www.moodlenews.com/2010/whats-in-store-for-moodlers-at-the-west-coast-moodlemoot-sloanconsortium/>
- <http://hosted.mediasite.com/mediasite/SilverlightPlayer/Default.aspx?peid=79a5e18120a144e39d8efd81aef888381d>
- http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CGAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.learnnowbc.ca%2Ffiles%2FPDF%2FOnline_Literature_Circles_2008_-_Rural_Schools_conference.pdf&ei=fJcVUMf3lpHtqAHt7IFY&usq=AFQjCNFCd-xfisc7EBjlluciXw3EEC000w&sig2=a3zg6loDbK3Uz0EhwCb54g
- <http://www.quillandquire.com/blog/index.php/2008/07/28/schools-in-for-canlit/>

Arrow and Slokan Lakes Region - School District # 10

