

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK
2011-2012**

**GEORGE M. DAWSON SECONDARY
#50 Haida Gwaii**

Leadership Team

David McLean, Derek Seifert, Zoe Sikora, Colleen Williams

Contacts

dmclean@sd50.bc.ca, dseifert@sd50.bc.ca

School Context/Community Involvement

George M. Dawson has a population of approximately 100 students, 70% of whom are Haida. We are located in Masset at the northern tip of Graham Island, on beautiful Haida Gwaii. We are struggling with declining numbers, decreased funding, and a student body that struggles to see the relevance of academic pursuits. Our staff is a committed group focusing on making education culturally responsive while maintaining academic integrity.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

How do informal learning activities containing multidisciplinary content and taking advantage of local places impact relationships and learning?

Links with District Enhancement Agreement

Our question addresses/echoes goal 3 in our District Enhancement Agreement. The goal is: Increase Culturally Responsive Education in our classrooms and schools in the academic curriculum. Emphasis will be put on intertwining Science, Math, Social Studies and Language Arts with the language, history, culture, and ecology of Haida Gwaii.

Strategies

Provide opportunities for students to interact with the local environment (both wild spaces and human made places). Plan events that allow students to see how learning in different classes is connected and encourage learning as a lifelong pursuit that is not dependent upon being in school.

School Findings

Many events and outings this year have served to connect learning in a variety of classes. Students continue to take part in foods programming with a local flavour, events have been planned honouring local language leaders, and students have been stepping up to defend this place as a way of life is threatened by government and oil money. We have found that students are very passionate about place and that time spent in local places provides bonding opportunities, community building, and a unified front against the 'foreign radicals' and industrialists who would risk cultural genocide for the sake of oil.

AESN Plans for 2012-2013

We intend to continue our endeavour to connect with local places. We believe that student success is connected to both relationships and self-esteem, both of which are developed through quality experiences in local settings.

Reflections, Advice

Over the past few years we have done a lot of new things at our school, we have taken some risks and there have been bumps in the road, but with each addition to the school comes increased confidence that we can pull it off, and we are. In recent years we have started a field school day, this year students added their voices to the Joint Review Panel on the proposed Enbridge pipeline, we have added a greenhouse

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and lunch program to the school, held a community event to celebrate the Haida language, students have gone seaweed collecting, hunting, fishing, and clam digging. The more we have going on in the school the more opportunities there are for students to learn, to connect the informal to the formal.