

---

For immediate release

16 October 2019

### **Valley Becomes the first in Canada to go District-wide with the Downie-Wenjack Legacy Schools Program**

**Comox Valley, B.C.** – The Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund (DWF) announced in August that Comox Valley Schools became the first District in Canada to sign on all schools to the Legacy School project.

The Legacy School program is a national initiative to engage, empower and connect students and educators to further reconciliation through awareness, education and action (reconciliACTION).

“To be the first school district in Canada to commit all schools to the Legacy School program is quite an honour,” shared Tom Demeo, Superintendent. “Embracing Indigenous ways and knowing is one of our key goals in our Strategic Priorities Plan that sets the direction for education for the next four years. The Legacy School program was the perfect fit to help us in this journey.”

DWF provides educational resources and program material for educators to develop lessons and programs that will ensure the unique interests, rights, and perspectives of Indigenous peoples are recognized and implemented in schools and communities across Canada.

Each of the 23 school sites received a toolkit at the start of the school year and have already initiated unique and creative activities to support Indigenous learning. Many of the schools are participating in a walk during [Secret Path](#) Week (October 17 - 21) to mark the anniversary of the passing of Chanie Wenjack. Ecole Robb Road and Hornby Island are following the [Six Cedar Trees](#) to create a school-wide understanding and culture around reconciliation. Valley View has embraced the Legacy School program with music by introducing songs Downie’s iconic band Tragically Hip into music class.

Some school educators have already started work around reconciliation well before the District made an all-school commitment to the program and are setting examples for others to follow.

At Highland Secondary, Art teacher Charlotte Hood-Tanner led her Grade 11/12 class through a reconciliation learning journey that began in September 2018 and involved incorporating the 94 calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Students worked with a local artist to produce a silk-screened composition of five original Indigenous design symbols to personify *jeqajɛ* meaning “to hope.”

A key piece of Hood-Tanner's project *Hope and Love Beyond the 94: A Journey of Reconciliation* was to honour the Indigenous K'omoks language through art as a small step toward understanding reconciliation and closing the gap between schools and communities. A copy of the silkscreen art collection now hangs on display in the School Board Office to remind staff and trustees of its commitment to the strategic priority around reconciliation.

"Even before fully adopting this program we have seen a lot of work around the District. Staff are passionate to dive in, eager to learn and to grow alongside their students with this program," explained Bruce Carlos, District Principal Indigenous Education. "The resources in the Legacy School toolkit will further empower our school district to implement strategies to become champions of reconciliation. The journey ahead will be enriching and rewarding."

-End-

For more information about the Secret Path Week visit <https://downiewenjack.ca/our-work/secret-path-week/>

For more information about the Downie-Wenjack Fund Legacy Schools program visit <https://downiewenjack.ca/our-work/legacy-schools-programs/>

### **DWF Quick Facts**

- DWF was inspired by Chanie Wenjack's story as a residential school student and Gord Downie's call to build a better Canada that aims to build cultural understanding and create a path towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.
- DWF's work centres around improving the lives of Indigenous people by building awareness, education, and connections between all Canadians.
- A reconciliACTION is a meaningful action that moves reconciliation forward. ReconciliACTIONs aim to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together in the spirit of reconciliation to share, learn, and create awareness.

**Image** (Source: Comox Valley Schools)

- Legacy School Toolkit
- Airport Elementary showcases their commitment to the Legacy School program

### **Media Contact**

Mary Lee

Manager of Communications , Comox Valley Schools (School District 71)

[mary.lee@sd71.bc.ca](mailto:mary.lee@sd71.bc.ca)

(250) 334-5500