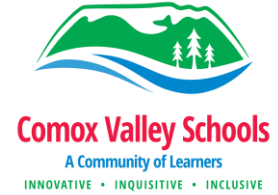


Comox Valley Schools (SD71)
607 Cumberland Rd., Courtenay, B.C. V9N 7G5
250-334-5500
www.comoxvalleyschools.ca



For immediate release

10 January 2020

Food Literacy in Valley grows with a new Farm to School coordinator

COMOX VALLEY, B.C. – Farm to Cafeteria Canada (F2CC) and the Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC) of British Columbia have enhanced the school district’s food literacy program with a new position to help grow opportunities for good nutrition for Valley students.

Jenn Meilleur was recently hired to lead a process to build and strengthen the community of practice around bringing healthy, local and sustainable food education into Valley schools.

Meilleur’s approach, in line with the F2CC philosophy, is to strengthen the work that has already been developing across the District, including salad bar programs, gardens, and education, with learning circles.

The learning circle process is a term coined by Indigenous communities and has been used successfully in a number of school districts across Canada to support the collaborative and community efforts to incorporate local food knowledge, sources, traditions, and culture.

“Working with the local food system is a wonderful opportunity to explore and work with reconciliation and to connect people more strongly with our local natural environment and sense of place. Through activities centering around food, we can learn about traditional foods and culture,” Meilleur explains. “For example, some salad bars have offered a day celebrating Indigenous Foods, which included foods like bannock and smoked salmon.”

Comox Valley was chosen as one of the regions in the province to have a coordinator position because of the existing solid base of interest and activity in the school district with partnering organizations. Since 2012, when the first salad bar program was introduced at Huband Park Elementary, an increasing amount of work around teaching students about sustainable food sources, better nutrition and the complex relationship food has with our climate, our culture, the community, and the economy has unfolded with more opportunity to expand.

-More-

Comox Valley Schools
607 Cumberland Road, Courtenay, BC V9N 7G5
www.comoxvalleyschools.ca

“The Board is thrilled that F2SC and SPARC are supporting our local school initiatives with the Food Literacy Learning Circle project. Access to local healthy food directly improves student success and sets the bar for lifelong healthy practices and career opportunities, shared Sheila McDonnell, Trustee. “The Food Literacy Learning Circle is an opportunity that will strengthen and lift our programs to the next level.”

In her short time in the new role Meilleur has developed an advisory group made up of key stakeholders from the school district and community champions of food literacy to ensure multiple perspectives and needs from Valley’s food system are incorporated in her work. The Advisory Committee comprising of Sheila McDonnell, Board Trustee; Serina Allison, District Outdoor Education lead teacher; Maurita Prato, Lush Valley Executive Director; Elder Barb White; and Arzeena Hamir, owner of Amara Farms, Regional District Co-Chair. The work of committee is to guide the Learning Circle process. Learning Circles session process involves bringing together a core group of key stakeholders from within schools, the local food supply sector, and the broader community, for a series of 3 planning, reporting, and networking sessions. They will meet three times over the next 18 months to plan actions, share knowledge, create working groups, report, and network.

“Each of the learning circle sessions is an opportunity to develop, reflect and enhance the school district, school, and community’s vision and efforts around the farm to school concept we already have in place. Through the learning circle process, we will identify and prioritize how to grow the program further for long term sustainability and success,” explained Meilleur. “And, a key component to this work still needs to be fulfilled, the student’s perspective. This is vital to our work.”

Meilleur brings a wealth of experience and knowledge in sustainability and leadership. Working with a number of local governments and non-profits, Meilleur has been involved in implementing many sustainability initiatives focused on environmental conservation, nature-based learning, moving towards zero waste, and increasing the amount of locally grown food. She also shares her background experience in facilitation, participatory leadership, climate action and community development. Currently Meilleur sits on the Comox Valley Community Health Network’s Coordinating Circle and is also a member of the Food Policy Council.

The first Learning Circle session will be held February 19 and will entail 20 to 30 members from the community who are involved with local food or supporting local food in schools in some capacity. Anyone interesting in being a part of the session, contact Jenn Meilleur, Farm to School Learning Circle Coordinator at f2scomoxvalley@gmail.com or via cell at 604.562.8769.

-End-

For more information about Farm to Cafeteria Canada visit <http://www.farmtocafeteriacanada.ca/>

Media Contact

Mary Lee
Manager of Communications
Comox Valley Schools (School District 71)
mary.lee@sd71.bc.ca
Office: (250) 334-5500
Mobile: (250) 792-3428

Image (Source: Comox Valley Schools)

Farm to School Comox Valley Advisory Committee members include (left to right) Arzeena Hamir, Jenn Meilleur, Sheila McDonnell, and Maurita Prato (Missing: Serina Allison and Elder Barb White).

[Facebook.com/ComoxValleySchools/](https://www.facebook.com/ComoxValleySchools/)
twitter.com/ComoxValleySD71/
[instagram.com/comoxvalleysd71/](https://www.instagram.com/comoxvalleysd71/)