



## Nature Kindergarten Proposal

### A. Rationale

The School District #27 Nature Kindergarten Program will be a program of choice which will integrate the provincial full-day Kindergarten program into an outdoor environment located in the Secwepemc territory on Scout Island. Learning activities take place outdoors and in the classroom in Scout Island Nature Centre on a regular basis. Regardless of the locale, all students participate in carefully planned activities that support their intellectual, emotional, social, artistic, aesthetic and physical development, just as in our regular Kindergarten programs. Children are involved in thoughtfully planned and presented learning experiences which promote: discovery, play, exploration, environmental stewardship and Aboriginal ways of learning and knowing.

### B. Goals and Objectives

Children in the Nature Kindergarten program will:

- Engage in rich educational experiences that meet the BC Kindergarten curricular outcomes in natural settings
- Discover trails, forested areas and explore aquatic environments
- Explore Aboriginal ways of learning and knowing
- Learn through purposeful exploration and play both outdoors and indoors within the traditional Secwepemc territory.
- Participate in safe, supportive daily physical activity and healthy living
- Foster inquiry skills through carefully-crafted experiences that facilitate conceptual, cognitive, and language development.
- Experience well-planned opportunities that nurture social-emotional learning, self-regulation and positive relationships with teachers and peers
- Learn the importance of environmental stewardship as this outdoor classroom becomes the community for which they are responsible.

### C. Implementation Timeline

If approved by the Board of Education, registration will begin in January 2016. The program will start in September 2016.

### D. Educational Value of the Program for the District

There is an emerging body of evidence regarding the developmental significance of contact with nature and its positive impact on children's physical and mental well-being. (Hewes, 2007) According to Parsons, "many researchers and child play advocates find that the changing relationship between children and our outdoor world is having lasting effects on play and the creation of environmental identity, other researchers are finding that outdoor play offers countless health benefits." (Parsons, 2011) Nature-based Kindergartens and preschool programs have been in place in Europe for many years. It is important to provide choice to families entering our school district to meet their varied needs and interests. This program is distinct from existing educational programs because it integrates the provincial Kindergarten program into an outdoor environment for a significant period of each school day. The Nature Kindergarten will adhere to provincial and/or local class size regulations.



### **E. Description of the qualifications and nature of teaching support staff required**

It is anticipated that the Nature Kindergarten teacher will have:

- Educational preparation or experience teaching Kindergarten;
- Knowledge of the Kindergarten curriculum, Primary Program and the Early Learning Framework;
- Certification, training, and/or experience in outdoor education programs with younger children;
- Emergency Level First Aid and /or Emergency child care First Aid and CPR-Community Care certification
- Ability to assess risks for younger children

An adult assistant will be assigned to the class to provide additional adult support for learning opportunities. (EA /ECE)

### **F. Location and Affiliation**

The Nature Kindergarten will be a Marie Sharpe Elementary School program. Parents of Kindergarten students who register at Marie Sharpe Elementary School will have the option of registering for the Scout Island Nature Kindergarten program or the regular program. Parents of students designated to attend other schools will be able to apply for a School of choice for their child (see below).

The program will operate using the existing preschool room at Scout Island Nature Centre. Outdoor learning activities will take place on Scout Island.

### **G. Student Registration Guidelines**

Due to the unique nature of this program, the registration process is distinct from other Kindergarten registration timelines.

Before students are accepted into the Nature Kindergarten Program:

- Parents/guardians of students in the Marie Sharpe Elementary catchment area must register their students at Marie Sharpe Elementary. Parents/guardians of students outside the Marie Sharpe Elementary catchment area must first register their students at their catchment school and then submit a School of Choice application to have their students attend Marie Sharpe Elementary.
- Parents/guardians interested in registering in the Nature Kindergarten Program will be required to attend an information session. If a parent/guardian/caregiver is unable to attend, they may appoint a proxy to attend in their place.
- Parents/guardians/caregivers/proxy attending this event are provided with the Nature Kindergarten Application form that will supplement the SD #27 Registration Form. Parents/guardians/caregivers/proxy must complete this form in order to register for Nature Kindergarten.
- District policy regarding student registration and School of Choice will be followed.



**H. Evidence of Similar Programs' Success**

Sooke School District (#62) opened a Nature Kindergarten Pilot Project at Sangster Elementary in September 2012. The research findings after two years were very favourable. (Dr. Enid Elliot). Greater Victoria School District (#61) opened a Coastal Kindergarten in September 2014. Abbotsford School District (#34) plan on opening two Nature Kindergarten programs in September 2015. Nature-based or forest Kindergartens have been operating in Europe for many years.

**I. Transportation**

All students will be able to ride a bus to and from the Scout Island Nature Centre each day from Marie Sharpe Elementary. This will be at no extra cost to the Board.

**J. Safety & Risk Management**

District staff will work closely with SINC staff to conduct risk management assessments and create a risk management plan for the Nature Kindergarten program. District staff and SINC staff will continue throughout the program's planning and implementation to ensure that the plan is implemented and inherent risks are mitigated. See the attached Nature Kindergarten Risk Management Process.