



AGENDA

Wednesday, December 10, 2025 10:30 AM
Education Committee – SD 64 (Gulf Islands)

Called to order:

- 1. Adoption of Agenda**
- 2. Adoption of May 28, 2025, Summary (*attachment*)**
- 3. Business Arising**
- 4. New Business**
 - a. GISPA Review (*attachments*)
 - b. Personal Digital Devices (*attachments*)
 - c. Outer Island Programs (*attachment*)
 - d. Indigenous Education (*attachments*)
- 5. Next Meeting: January 28, 2026, Teams**
- 6. Adjournment:**



Summary
Education Committee – SD 64 (Gulf Islands)
Wednesday, May 28, 2025, 10:00 AM

In attendance:

Committee: Nancy Macdonald (Committee Chair), Tisha Boulter, Gregory Lucas, Chaya Katrensky (Board Chair, ex-officio)

Trustees: Deborah Luporini Jeannine Georgeson, Rob Pingle

Staff: Jill Jensen (Superintendent), Jesse Guy (Secretary Treasurer), Boe Beardsmore (Associate Superintendent), Lori Deacon (Director of Corporate Services) on-line, Shauna Klem (Executive Assistant)

Partner Group Representatives: Adrian Pendergast (GIPVPA), Ian Mitchell (GITA) on-line, Angela Thomas (CUPE) on-line, Katherine Hazen (DPAC) on-line

Absent: Lyall Ruehlen (Director of Instruction)

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 a.m. by the Committee Chair Nancy Macdonald

1. Adoption of Agenda

Adoption of the agenda by consensus.

2. Approval of Summary

Correction: The Chair of the Sept. 24, 2024 Committee Meeting was Chaya Katrensky.

Summary of September 25, 2024, Education Committee Meeting, with amendment, adopted by consensus.

3. Business Arising

4. New Business

a) Accessibility

Associate Superintendent Beardsmore reported on the work of the District Accessibility Group, highlighting short and long term goals to improve accessibility for students, staff, parents and community members. Over the past year, the Accessibility Group has reviewed the previous years' accessibility barriers and gathered feedback from the District Accessibility Reporting Tool. The Tool is available on the District website, the SD64 app, and Facebook page. To date, five submissions have been made via the District Accessibility Reporting Tool and those accessibility barriers have been resolved or shared with Facilities. The District Accessibility Group is made up of volunteers who support the District in improving accessibility.

b) Mental Health in Schools

Superintendent Jill Jensen provided an overview of the Provincial Mental Health in School Strategy, which was presented at the Mental Health in Schools Conference held on May 5 and 6. The ERASE strategy, used by BC schools, addresses areas including diversity and inclusion, mental health and substance use, and school and online safety.



Superintendent Jensen introduced the Mental Health in Schools Approach, emphasizing Compassionate Systems Leadership. She highlighted the science of well-being and compassionate systems practices within the BC education system.

c) *Anti-racism*

Boe Beardsmore provided an update on the District's ongoing efforts to dismantle racism and exclusionary practices. Highlighted were ongoing anti-racism and oppression education, as well as the means of reporting and addressing incidents of racism. It is acknowledged that this is critical and ongoing work.

5. Next Meeting: December 10, 2025

6. Adjournment: 11:44 a.m.

DISTRICT PROGRAM REVIEW FALL 2025

GISPA

**TRANSFORMATIVE ARTS.
INSPIRED FUTURES.**



GULF ISLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT NO 64

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Transformative Arts. Inspired Futures.

Welcome to our GISPA District Program Review Report, a showcase of the artistry, growth, and deep learning that define this unique and powerful program.

"I would go so far as to say that GISPA was the single most transformative educational experience of my life."

— Fiona Pirie, GISPA alumni; professional actor

Igniting Creativity – Strengthening Community

Dear Review Committee,

The Gulf Islands School of Performing Arts (GISPA) is a signature program of the Gulf Islands School District, known for its innovation, creative excellence, and student-centered approach. For more than two decades, it has offered an integrated, ensemble-based education in dance, music, and theatre that reflects the community's core values of creativity, learning, and connection. GISPA stands as both an educational program and a cultural institution, contributing meaningfully to the artistic life of Gulf Islands Secondary School, Salt Spring Island, and the surrounding Gulf Islands.

Students perform at high academic and creative levels, demonstrating initiative, collaboration, and leadership, and many graduates go on to advanced studies or professional arts pathways. Feedback from families, alumni, and community members consistently reinforces the transformative nature of the GISPA experience. Year after year, performances at ArtSpring Theatre and other community venues highlight not only students' technical skill and artistry, but also the confidence, empathy, and sense of purpose developed through sustained collaborative creation.

Research increasingly identifies participation in the performing arts as a "health-promoting" pursuit, with school-based programs supporting artistic growth alongside emotional resilience, social connection, and overall wellness. This is evident in the friendships and strong relationships that develop through the immersive work of a GISPA production. Many students continue to engage in artistic endeavours for years afterward, whether in GISS arts courses or within the broader Gulf Islands community.

GISPA embodies this health-promoting potential: it is a place where students build identity, community, and well-being through meaningful creative work.

This report provides an overview of GISPA's purpose, reach, and implementation; examines student impact and overall effectiveness; and outlines commitments to equity, inclusion, and fiscal responsibility. It also reviews resource allocation, long-term sustainability, and community engagement, concluding with program-specific responses and a summary of themes identified in supporting testimonials. While the program's strengths are clear, the report also considers the realities and implications of delivering a specialized, fee-based, small-enrolment program of choice within a small secondary school.

Throughout the document, you will see student, family, alumni, and community testimonials woven into each section, alongside images that bring the learning to life. Together, these voices and visuals provide authentic evidence of a program that is relevant, impactful, and deeply aligned with the Gulf Islands School District's strategic direction and GISS's goal of Deepening Learning.

Sincerely,



Ryan Massey
Principal
Gulf Islands Secondary School



"GISPA, and the performing arts as a whole, holds the power to carry us forwards through even the most grueling of life's trials... it was a fundamental pillar in my development as a human being."
— Corbin Roome, GISPA alumni

Program Overview



Part One - Program Overview

Purpose and Primary Goal

The Gulf Islands School of Performing Arts (GISPA) is an integrated performing arts academy that provides advanced education in dance, music, and theatre for students in Grades 10 to 12 at Gulf Islands Secondary School. The purpose of the program is to nurture creative expression, technical skills, and collaboration through a student-driven, ensemble-based approach.

GISPA emphasizes original creation, where students collectively devise and produce works that combine choreography, musical composition, and theatre performance. Student agency is at the heart of the program, as students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning while developing confidence, artistry, and leadership through authentic creative processes.

Students receive comprehensive, ongoing training in dance, music or theatre supported by discipline specialist teachers, master classes, and workshops with visiting artists. They gain exposure to regional professional performing arts productions in Victoria and Vancouver, and each year culminates in an original, student-created performance at ArtSpring Theatre.

The primary goal of GISPA is to cultivate creative, skilled, and self-aware students through the performing arts. Secondary goals include developing strong technical proficiency in specialized disciplines and, for those who aspire to it, preparing students for postsecondary studies and professional opportunities in the performing arts.

Origins and Ongoing Relevance

GISPA was founded in 2003 as a district magnet academy in response to both declining enrolment and the community's strong artistic culture. Building on the success of earlier GISS productions such as *Grease*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *Swimmers*, the program emerged as a collaborative initiative led by educators and artists committed to creating an innovative, integrated performing arts experience.

Supported by then Principal Nancy MacDonald and a team including Bruce Smith, Sonia Langer, and Mitch Howard, GISPA positioned Salt Spring Island as a regional hub for advanced performing arts education.

The program quickly attracted families from across British Columbia, Canada, and internationally, drawn by its reputation for excellence and creativity.

Today, GISPA remains deeply relevant. The performing arts foster empathy, communication, collaboration, and self-expression, skills increasingly vital for student well-being in an age of digital fragmentation and social disconnection. The program continues to attract students from across the Gulf Islands, Vancouver Island and beyond, serving as both a magnet for enrollment and a cornerstone of the district's identity as a community that values creativity, learning, and connection.



Most schools perform shows that have been done a thousand times... GISPA doesn't do this. From the concept to the costumes, from the songs to the stage, it is all fresh, exciting and new.

— Tara MacLean, international recording artist & mentor

Evolution of Program Delivery

GISPA's delivery model is flexible and adaptive, responding to the unique composition, interests, and strengths of each year's ensemble. While the structure and core values remain consistent, the specific areas of focus within the curricular goals, along with the final performance, evolve each year through an emergent, student informed process.

Key program features include:

- Integrated timetable combining one block of English Language Arts with one specialist performing arts block in music, theatre or dance
- Workshops and master classes with professional artists
- Learning experiences in Victoria and Vancouver
- Year-end original production at ArtSpring Theatre

Since its inception, the program has shifted from relying on early morning and after school rehearsals to being fully integrated into the regular school timetable. This transition has reduced, though not

Part One - Program Overview

eliminated, the need for staff to contribute significant time outside the instructional day and has improved long-term sustainability for both students and educators. The addition of specialized instructors, such as ballet technique teachers, has further strengthened the program's technical depth.

Alignment with the District's Strategic Direction

GISPA aligns with the district's strategic direction through its focus on creative expression, inclusion, collaboration, and reflection. The program embodies the principles of **KNOW, BE, UNDERSTAND**, and **DO**, giving students meaningful opportunities to learn about themselves, their community, and their world through the performing arts.

KNOW

GISPA provides structure for students to explore truth and reconciliation through artistic inquiry. Collective creations examine identity, belonging, and justice, encouraging learners to question assumptions, listen deeply, and engage with multiple perspectives. The program recognizes the unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples and integrates learning from local knowledge systems, stories, and teachings.

Students study the cultural roots of the art forms they practice, including musical lineages, Indigenous worldviews in movement and storytelling, and the social histories that shape theatre. This strengthens awareness of representation, bias, and cultural responsibility.



Part One - Program Overview

BE

The ensemble model places belonging and connection at the centre of GISPA. Students build trust, develop empathy, and value each person's contributions as they work across music, dance, and theatre. The program creates a safe space for creative risk taking and supports students in developing identity and voice. This work aligns with district goals of fostering wellbeing, social justice, and inclusive learning communities.

UNDERSTAND

GISPA immerses students in deep learning through creative inquiry. They analyze and interpret complex human experiences and transform their understanding into performance.

Teachers model reflection and invite students to take ownership of their learning, which strengthens agency and engagement. The collaborative process of sharing ideas, revising work, and responding to feedback develops curious, critical, and creative thinkers.

DO

Students learn that artistic work carries responsibility. They practice reliability, discipline, and accountability as they bring original productions to life. Rehearsal processes emphasize care for one another, respect for resources, and strong community partnerships. In this way, GISPA brings purpose and action together, modelling integrity in student centred creative practice.

Alongside its alignment with SD64 strategic direction, GISPA is one of the school's strongest exemplars of the school goal of Deepening Learning. The program brings mastery, identity, and creativity together in meaningful and challenging learning experiences that reflect the core aims of the school plan.

GISPA's integrated structure allows students to develop deep expertise in dance, music, or theatre through sustained practice, mentorship, and authentic performance. Students refine technical skills, experiment with new techniques, and build confidence through disciplined effort, feedback, and continual growth.

Identity is central to the program. Through original creation and performance, students explore who they are, what they value, and how their voices contribute to the world around them.

The ensemble model fosters self-awareness, empathy, and a strong sense of belonging.

Creativity is a defining feature of the GISPA experience. Students choreograph, compose, devise, and design original work that responds to real world contexts. Their performances are collective acts of creation, blending movement, music, and theatre into new forms that emerge from inquiry, problem solving, and design thinking. The program reflects deepening learning by fostering a collaborative and reflective culture where students learn through experimentation, feedback, and refinement.



"The GISPA program aligns with the Strategic Plan's aspirations to empower student agency, engagement, and voice and nurture curious, critical, and creative learners."

— Aisha Balint, GISPA alumni, Indigenous Success Teacher SD72

Program Outcomes

GISPA aims to graduate students who:

- Exhibit strong creative, collaborative, and reflective capacities as artists and learners
- Display confidence, empathy, and leadership developed through ensemble work and performance
- Contribute to their communities through creative expression and cultural participation
- Demonstrate advanced technical proficiency in Dance, Music, or Theatre
- Are prepared for postsecondary education or professional pathways in the performing arts

These outcomes align with BC's Core Competencies and the school's goal of fostering personalized, deeper learning that connects knowledge, identity, and creativity.

Program Location and Reach

The Gulf Islands School of Performing Arts is based at Gulf Islands Secondary School on Salt Spring Island, serving students from Salt Spring Island, Galiano, Mayne, Pender, and Saturna Islands, as well as students from Vancouver Island and beyond.



Since transferring high schools from the mainland to the small community island, I thought there wouldn't be opportunities for my passion... I was very wrong.

— Christina Kennedy, GISPA alumni; recording artist

Demographics



Part Two - Demographics



GISPA Student Enrollment

The program typically serves around 20 students each year, with some cohorts reaching up to 30 depending on interest and capacity. The enrolment for the current year is 17 students. This small and vibrant community forms an ensemble that supports close mentorship, strong collaboration, and personalized learning. Students are drawn from across the Gulf Islands and beyond, united by a shared commitment to creativity, performance, and artistic growth.

Class Size and Structure

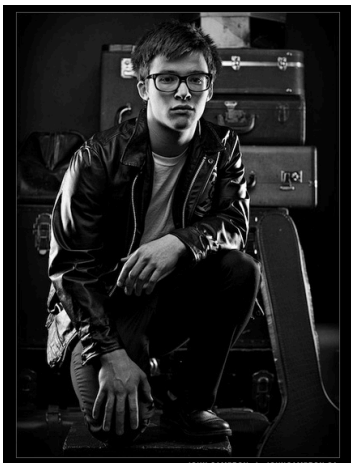
Students begin the year working in specialist classes in dance, music, and theatre, taught by discipline-specific teachers who help build strong technical foundations. GISPA has three teachers assigned to the GISPA teaching block, which creates a different instructional structure from the typical Grade 10–12 class model. With three teachers supporting a cohort of around 18–20 students, the effective ratio is approximately one teacher for every six students. This is notably smaller than the district's average secondary class size of about 22 students per teacher and reflects the program's integrated, multi-disciplinary design.

As students progress through the year, the structure shifts toward collaborative groups and full-cast rehearsals, allowing them to combine their learning and prepare the culminating production. Smaller groupings support a cohesive ensemble culture, and multiple teachers working simultaneously support coaching, feedback, and rehearsal facilitation across the program's various spaces.



Program Capacity

Enrollment is guided by both physical and instructional capacity. While there has been no formal cap, the program design functions well with 20 to 30 students but could expand to 45 with adequate space considerations. Larger company classes require flexible spaces for movement, music, and performance, along with appropriate instructional support. The focus has always been on maintaining an environment that balances high-quality learning, collaboration, and creative production.



Grade Levels Served

GISPA currently serves students in Grades 10 through 12, and the faculty is open to exploring opportunities for younger learners in future years. Earlier exposure to ensemble-based learning can strengthen skill development and deepen artistic identity and providing opportunities for experienced performing artists in Grades 8 and 9 could support continuity, mentorship, and long-term vitality throughout the high school journey. At the same time, there is an understanding that expanding entry to younger grades carries implications for overall funding models and the sustainability of other programs and would require careful consideration within the broader timetable and resourcing context.

Part Two - Demographics

Student Populations Served

GISPA welcomes students with a passion for the performing arts and the desire and willingness to learn through creativity, collaboration, and self-expression. Students enter with diverse experiences and aspirations, and the learning environment nurtures both emerging and advanced artists. The program's inclusive culture emphasizes teamwork, empathy, and respect, ensuring that every student can grow in confidence and find their voice as part of a collective creative endeavour.

Featured Parent - Tanis Beaver

I have witnessed first hand how effective the program is for students. Two of our sons are GISPA Theatre alumni. In the first instance, our son was able to pursue his love for language and drama with a teacher and students who were equally enthused and were willing to expand their horizons, incorporating dance and music into their productions. The students made life long friendships, gained creative confidence and excelled in all they did. That student is now an English Teacher himself. In the second instance, our shy creative son was encouraged to find his feet, make friends and allow his creativity to flourish. He too, made life long friends, developed a confidence beyond belief and blossomed with the process that GISPA encouraged. That student is now a Theatre Technician and is well on the way to his ultimate goal of becoming a professional Theatre Set Designer. I would say the program has been extremely effective.





Standard issue Theatre and Music (and occasionally Dance) programs at the secondary level throughout the Province no doubt do good work, but what GISPA offers is more than an inventory of performance skills. It immerses students in the ecology of the living arts. “Here is a play, complex in form, by a contemporary Canadian playwright, that explores the question of how human relationships can adapt to social stress and the possibility of unexpected death. Now, what can we do with this and bring it to life on the stage?” Finding the answer to this must come from the students themselves. And we must trust that they can do so. As an educational experience, this is a far cry from yet another production of Grease, which one might expect from a conventional program.

— George Sipos, Former ArtSpring Executive Director

Program Implementation



Part Three - Program Implementation

Implementation Across the District

GISPA operates as a yearlong, integrated program within the regular school timetable at Gulf Islands Secondary School. Students earn both their English Language Arts credit and their specialized performing arts instruction within one block in each semester, and one of the GISPA specialist teachers also teaches the English component to ensure strong connection and continuity. The weekly schedule often alternates between English and arts-focused days, with flexibility to accommodate visiting clinicians, workshops, and creative production needs.

Learning extends beyond the classroom. Students regularly participate in professional workshops, master classes, and field experiences that connect them to the broader performing arts community. Each year, students attend live performances at ArtSpring and take part in trips to Victoria or Vancouver to collaborate with professional artists and attend major productions, expanding understanding of both craft and career pathways. Dancers also have the opportunity to train in classical Ballet technique twice a week after school, supporting technical development and enhancing ensemble work.

The program makes full use of specialized arts facilities, including the dance studio, music room, and theatre space, each equipped with appropriate instruments, lighting, and sound equipment. These shared resources enhance learning for all arts students and help maintain professional standards in training and production.

GISPA is supported by a highly skilled faculty of three specialist teachers in dance, music, and theatre, each contributing one block of instructional time as part of their assignment. Together, they form a cohesive team that brings deep expertise and a shared vision to the learning environment. Beyond their formal teaching roles, GISPA teachers regularly extend their work beyond the school day, dedicating significant time to rehearsals, field experiences, student mentorship, and professional collaborations, an ongoing commitment that enriches the program and its outcomes.

Professional Development and Training

Professional learning is embedded within the GISPA model. Teachers engage in professional development

Featured Artist - Fiona Pine

GISPA's training expanded my capabilities beyond what I understood at the time. Through workshops with visiting artists, masterclasses, and field trips to major productions, I arrived at two of the world's top drama schools more prepared than most of my peers. I had not only studied the great practitioners of acting—I had workshopped their methods, applied their techniques, and collaborated with professional artists throughout my high school years. Much of my résumé and the opportunities that followed were made possible through the GISPA program.

— Fiona Pirie, GISPA alumni; professional actor (Guildhall School of Music & Drama; Mountview Academy)

through collaboration with visiting artists, participation in master classes, and attendance at professional performances with students. These experiences provide exposure to current practices and innovations in the performing arts.

Faculty also participate in district and provincial professional learning initiatives, connecting their work to broader educational goals such as Deepening Learning and Compassionate Systems Leadership. The blend of professional artistry and educational inquiry ensures that GISPA's teaching remains current and reflective.

Roles and Responsibilities

GISPA faculty operate as a coordinated team. Each teacher is responsible for their discipline, dance, music, theatre, or English, while also contributing to the overall creative and instructional design of the program. Collaboration is a defining feature of their work. Teachers plan and deliver learning experiences that intersect and overlap, ensuring a seamless integration of artistic and academic growth.

Although formal collaboration time within the timetable is limited, teachers have developed creative ways to coordinate planning, feedback, and rehearsal time. Their shared commitment is evident in the execution of productions and the quality demonstration of student learning.

Student Impact and Outcomes



I would say GISPA was at the heart of my high school experience... it shaped my confidence, creativity, and ability to collaborate with others.

— Samara Sladen-Dew,
GISPA Dance alumni



Part Four - Student Impact and Outcomes



Student Selection and Entry

Students join GISPA through an audition process that reflects both their skill development and their potential for growth within an ensemble-based environment. Auditions assess technical ability, creativity, collaboration, and commitment to the performing arts. Many students prepare for years to participate in GISPA, and acceptance into the program is seen as a meaningful milestone for young performing artists. While auditions have always reflected common practices in the performing arts, the process has evolved from earlier, more selective years to focus on interest, readiness, and fit for the ensemble-based learning environment, ensuring the program remains both aspirational and accessible.

Local music, dance, and theatre instructors often encourage their students to set GISPA as a goal, and many young artists in the Gulf Islands see the program as a natural next step in their artistic pathway. This reputation for excellence helps sustain a culture of dedication to the arts across the district.



Assessing Student Progress and Success

Assessment in GISPA is authentic, ongoing, and connected to professional artistic practice. Each strand, dance, music, and theatre, uses performance-based assessment tools that mirror postsecondary and professional standards.

In music, students complete technical juries that include repertoire performance, skill demonstrations, and progress documentation through practice logs. They also prepare an Electronic Press Kit, compiling recordings, photographs, and written artist materials, an artifact they can use when applying for postsecondary programs or professional opportunities. Students are also marked based on their contributions to group compositions and collaborations as well as their overall participation in the final performance.

In theatre, assessment is integrated into daily and weekly creative work. Students are evaluated on performance quality, collaboration, design, and written reflections using rubrics that emphasize meaning, content, style, and form. The culminating year end production serves as a demonstration of learning, uniting all strands in a high-quality student-created performance.

In dance, much of the assessment is immediate and specific. During technique classes, dancers receive verbal feedback, teacher demonstrations, and video review to support improvement. This feedback often focuses on body alignment, connection of limbs to the core, use of turnout, and other technical elements within a movement sequence. Students are also assessed on their participation in group exercises, both within dance and in interdisciplinary work with actors and musicians. Choreographic contributions to the final production are evaluated using rubrics that consider clarity of movement and the effectiveness of conveying ideas, character, or plot. A final written reflection asks dancers to review their year in GISPA and self-assess their learning. Final grades often reflect the high standards students achieve, supported by strong focus, rapid growth, and the many hours they dedicate outside class to developing and rehearsing choreography.



Part Four - Student Impact and Outcomes

Impact on Student Engagement and Growth

GISPA has a strong impact on student engagement, confidence, and leadership. Students demonstrate high levels of motivation and accountability, and this positive momentum often carries into their other courses, where they continue to maintain strong academic standing. Expectations for professionalism, collaboration, and respect are woven into daily learning and further reinforce these habits across their school experience.

The impact is evident in personal development. Students build resilience, empathy, and communication skills as they take creative risks, manage complex projects, and perform for authentic audiences. The shared purpose of performance creates belonging and accomplishment, uniting diverse learners around common goals and shared expression.

Students learn real-world skills not just in the year-end production, but also in community performances throughout the year. For example, GISPA musicians learn how to put together two full-length sets for gigs at local festivals or venues, how to create a stage plot and communicate with audio engineers, and how to engage an audience. GISPA students also go on tour each year to perform at local elementary schools. They gain experience adapting performances to different spaces and audiences, set up scenery, sound and light equipment, develop confidence speaking and performing for younger students, and practice the teamwork and professionalism required to take a show on the road.

Supporting Diverse Learners

GISPA is designed to meet diverse needs through its flexible, student-centered approach. Each year's ensemble shapes the application of the curriculum, allowing the program to adapt to unique strengths, interests, and learning styles. This provides a foundation for differentiation, where students contribute in ways that align with their skills and passions, whether through choreography, design, composition, or performance.

The inclusive culture attracts a wide range of students, including those who identify as neurodivergent or gender diverse.

The collaborative nature of the work allows each student to find meaningful ways to contribute and to be valued as part of the collective. Teachers work with learning support staff and individual education plans to ensure that all students thrive artistically and personally.

GISPA also has a history of supporting international and multilingual students. The arts provide a universal language through which students can express ideas, connect with others, and build confidence.

Featured Artist - Kahlila Ball

On a career level, GISPA prepared me for hard work and independence. Since graduating GISS, I've studied at Studio 58's conservatory for acting in Vancouver. After graduating post secondary school, I've continued that work as an actor. Every step of my career has been informed by the exceptional training I received through the GISPA program on Salt Spring Island. It connected me with many industry professionals through workshops and field trips and introduced me to a wide range of performance styles. The program's focus on original work and collective creation is incredibly unique. I can honestly say that it helped hone my artistic voice much earlier than my peers in post secondary. I arrived at college ready to create my own work whereas my friends from different backgrounds were just beginning to fathom what that might look like. In an industry as competitive and challenging as acting, having the tools to make original work and self-produce is a skill that can set you apart and keep you working steadily. As an actor, I owe so much of my artistic success to the support and teachings of the GISPA program.

—Kahlila Ball, GISPA Alumni; Professional Actor (Studio 58)



Looking at the productions and outcomes from this program it is clear you have an amazing program... I have often thought it was such a beacon of how Fine Arts can be advanced in a secondary school setting.”
— Colin Plant, Secondary Drama Teacher, SD63

Program Effectiveness



Part Five - Program Effectiveness

Evidence of Program Success

GISPA has a strong reputation for excellence in performing arts education. Over more than two decades, it has produced graduates who have gone on to study at prestigious postsecondary institutions and pursue careers in dance, music, theatre, film, and education. The program's success reflects its ability to combine rigorous artistic training with a supportive and collaborative learning environment.

Each year culminates in an original, student-created performance at ArtSpring Theatre. This showcase is a visible and celebrated measure of effectiveness, demonstrating growth in skill, creativity, and professionalism. Audiences that include families, community members, and arts professionals regularly remark on the sophistication, authenticity, and emotional impact of these performances.

Beyond technical achievement, students show growth in confidence, leadership, and collaboration. They become more articulate in expressing ideas, more resilient in the face of challenges, and more capable of working within a diverse team to achieve a common vision. These are lifelong skills that extend beyond the arts.

Strengths of the Program

A key strength is the integrated and student-centered design. The program brings together dance, music, theatre, and English in ways that help students see connections across disciplines and understand the power of collaboration. The ensemble model ensures that learning is shared, relational, and meaningful.

Another strength is the quality of instruction and mentorship. Faculty members are practicing artists and experienced educators who model professionalism, artistic discipline, and lifelong learning, inspiring high standards of effort and excellence. Teacher student relationships are grounded in trust, authenticity, and shared purpose.

The program also benefits from deep community connections. Partnerships with ArtSpring, professional artists, and regional arts organizations provide exposure to real world performance opportunities and career pathways. These relationships reinforce the sense that GISPA is both a school program and a vital part of the Gulf Islands cultural landscape.

Challenges and Opportunities for Growth

While GISPA has many strengths, the program also faces opportunities for growth that will support long term sustainability and broaden access. One ongoing challenge is the need for stronger feeder programs that engage students earlier in the performing arts and sustain interest as they move toward secondary school. Strengthening partnerships with arts educators and rebuilding pathways for younger learners will help sustain enrollment and foster early interest.



"I can say without a shadow of a doubt that I would not be getting my BFA in Dance if I had not been in GISPA."

— Claire Whitelaw, GISPA alumni; SFU Dance

Expanding mentorship and outreach, particularly with middle years and elementary programs, can introduce more students to the creative process and create continuity across grades. There is also potential to increase collaboration with other departments, linking performing arts to areas such as media arts, social studies, and Indigenous education in ways that reflect deepening learning goals.

Looking ahead, the team sees value in deepening district support for performing arts education by strengthening elementary pathways and providing dedicated coordination and collaboration time. Additional resources for cross-school and interdisciplinary planning would help connect programs, support younger learners, and enhance continuity from elementary through secondary. Faculty remain committed to mentoring emerging artists, fostering cross-curricular connections, and nurturing the next generation of performers and creators.

Overall Program Impact

GISPA's effectiveness is reflected in the achievements of its students, the strength of its alumni, and the ongoing support of the community. The program nurtures students to be technically skilled, intellectually engaged, and emotionally aware, helping them develop a strong sense of identity and a deep appreciation for collaboration. As one of the district's most distinctive programs, GISPA shows that when students learn through creativity, mentorship, and authentic performance, they grow not only as artists but as confident and capable young people.



As a developmentally and behaviourally challenged student... the course was accommodating, safe, and challenged me to grow beyond what I believed possible.
— Alex Kink, GISPA alumni

Equity and Inclusion



Part Six - Equity and Inclusion

Promoting Equity and Inclusion

GISPA promotes equity and inclusion by design. The program attracts a diverse range of students who are drawn to its collaborative, expressive, and supportive environment. Many students who may not always feel a strong sense of belonging in traditional settings find connection, confidence, and purpose through GISPA and the performing arts. The ensemble model fosters empathy, teamwork, and mutual respect, ensuring that every student's contribution is valued and essential to collective success.

At the same time, the program recognizes that equity is not simply about who thrives once inside GISPA, but also about who feels welcome, informed, and able to participate in the first place. While GISPA draws students from a wide range of backgrounds, some learners may not initially see themselves reflected in the performing arts or may

assume the program is “not for them” due to cultural norms, confidence, or prior experience. This underscores the importance of sustained outreach, representation, and relationship-building to ensure that all students, especially those who may be hesitant or unsure, see GISPA as a space where they belong.

The program emphasizes individual growth within a community of shared purpose. Teachers model inclusive practices, encourage open dialogue, and celebrate the diversity of identities and experiences within each ensemble. By centring creativity and collaboration, students learn to appreciate differences, challenge assumptions, and build relationships across perspectives.

At the same time, GISPA continues to reflect on how well the program design supports students with a range of learning needs, cultural backgrounds, physical abilities, and lived experiences. Performing arts environments can involve sensory, physical, or emotional demands that may



Part Six - Equity and Inclusion



Featured Educator: Christina Knight

...in a post-Covid world, in the midst of a significant mental health crisis among young people, Arts education is more important than ever. The Arts are what people reach for when they need comfort, or company, or an outlet for themselves. Being involved in a program such as GISPA brings people together in a supportive and nurturing space, and through creating art kids find themselves, they support each other, and often, they heal. Every single Drama educator in our province who has been at it for any number of years knows that theatre saves lives. Every single one of us has had a student (or two, or more) who have expressed those very words. This theatre saved my life.

-Christine Knight ABCDE (BC Drama Educators Specialist Association) President

pose barriers for some learners, and the program remains committed to reducing these barriers wherever possible through thoughtful scaffolding, flexible participation structures, and ongoing consultation with families.

Barriers to Access

GISPA welcomes students from across the Gulf Islands and Vancouver Island, and it continues to explore ways to make participation accessible to all interested learners. Transportation and scheduling can present challenges for students who live on outer islands or who must travel long distances to attend after-school rehearsals and performances. Families and community partners often work together to support participation. At the same time, these logistical barriers may disproportionately affect students with fewer financial resources or limited family availability, making transportation an ongoing equity consideration.

The program fee, while used responsibly to support key features of the program, can also create a perceived or real barrier for some families. Even with financial support options in place, some students may choose not to apply because they assume the program is unaffordable or feel uncomfortable asking for assistance. Additional costs such as meals during long rehearsal days or travel for workshops and performances may further contribute to inequitable access.

Finally, perceived limited capacity in the program and the audition process can unintentionally introduce barriers. When spaces are perceived as scarce, students who already feel confident or supported may be more likely to apply, while others opt out despite interest. Ensuring transparent selection processes, broad outreach, and inclusive messaging helps mitigate this dynamic and supports equitable access across the district.

Cultural Competence in Program Design

Cultural competence is embedded in GISPA's curriculum and creative process. The performing arts explore and express culture, and annual productions often draw from diverse artistic traditions, historical contexts, and contemporary themes. Students learn to honour the origins and influences of the art forms they study, including the global and intercultural foundations of music, dance, and theatre.

Each year's creative work reflects exploration of identity, community, and belonging, encouraging critical thinking about whose stories are told and how they are represented. Faculty guide these discussions with sensitivity and awareness, helping students connect artistic work to broader understandings of social justice, equity, and inclusion. GISPA sets a standard of excellence and community that enriches the broader culture of Gulf Islands Secondary School and serves as a model for how the arts can lead equity work through empathy, shared creation, and authentic expression.



It is necessary to charge the student fee, but I think it is good value for money... The educational soundness is clear to everyone.

— Tanis Beaver, parent of two GISPA alumni

Resource Allocation



Part Seven - Resource Allocation

Instructional Funding and Class Size Context

GISPA's primary district resource allocation is instructional staffing. The program is assigned three teachers for the GISPA teaching block, which differs significantly from the typical Grade 10–12 class funding model. Secondary classes in the district typically operate at an average of approximately 22 students per teacher, with very few courses running below 15. While small classes do occur, these are generally limited to a handful each year, most often required graduation courses or specialized university-entrance courses, where running them at lower numbers is seen as necessary to meet student pathways.

In contrast, GISPA's ensemble structure results in three staffed blocks serving cohorts of about 20 students, creating an instructional ratio of roughly one teacher for every six to eight learners. This level of staffing does not appear elsewhere in the timetable and carries an opportunity cost, as the same allocation could otherwise support additional courses or student supports. While this reflects the program's design rather than inefficiency, it is important to acknowledge the structural trade offs involved. In light of these realities, GISPA is open to exploring alternative funding approaches that could help balance these costs, reduce pressure on other programs, and support long term sustainability while maintaining the integrity of the learning experience.

Funding Sources and Sustainability

GISPA's overall financial model combines district staffing, student tuition, and box office revenue from annual performances. Tuition contributes to enrichment opportunities such as workshops, master classes, and off-island field trips. Ticket sales significantly offset production-related expenses, including venue rentals, technical support, and performance materials.

The program also benefits from community fundraising, grants, and partnerships that enhance financial stability and help sustain high-quality programming from year to year. This diversified model reduces pressure on district operating funds while maintaining a robust learning experience.

Main Program Expenses

Beyond instructional staffing, the program's major expenses include:

- Travel and accommodations for off-island learning experiences
- Professional workshops and artist residencies
- Production materials (costumes, sets, props)
- Theatre venue fees and technical equipment
- Rehearsal and performance supports

These costs are primarily funded through tuition, ticket revenue, and self-generated funds. Careful resource stewardship ensures that expenditures directly support student learning, artistic development, and performance opportunities.



Sustainability and Improvement



GISPA stands as a model of how the performing arts can transform education and empower youth... DWN wholeheartedly supports the continuation and growth of GISPA.

— Debora Gordon, Dance West Network



Part Eight - Sustainability and Improvement

Long Term Plans for Growth or Expansion

GISPA aims to strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration and increase opportunities for students across the arts. There is interest in expanding partnerships within the school, with programs such as media and industrial design, and by expanding offerings in technical theatre, such as sound and lighting, costume and set design, and stagecraft. These collaborations would broaden learning pathways and support development of more school-wide productions.

The program also sees long-term potential in reconnecting with younger learners across the district. Increasing access for elementary and middle-years students and offering introductory performing arts experiences could build a strong K–12 continuum and deepen early skill development and interest.

Current Challenges and Considerations

While GISPA is a valued and impactful program, there are several challenges and considerations that shape its long term sustainability. These reflect the realities of operating a specialized, small enrolment performing arts program within a small secondary school.

Enrolment can fluctuate from year to year, and even small shifts in student interest or grade level demographics affect cohort size. Sustaining steady numbers requires strong feeder pathways, consistent visibility across the district, and ongoing communication with younger learners and families.

GISPA also requires dedicated staffing and specific blocks of time, which influences the school's ability to run other courses and supports. Maintaining this balance within the broader timetable is an ongoing consideration. Considering alternative funding approaches could help sustain the program while reducing pressure on the school's overall timetable and course offerings.

Financial and perceived financial barriers remain a factor. Even with bursaries available, costs related to fees, travel, and production days can deter participation. Clear communication and proactive supports help ensure equitable access.

Equity and representation remain important considerations. Differences in early arts exposure, transportation barriers from outer islands, cultural

comfort with performance work, and financial realities can influence who sees GISPA as accessible. Intentional outreach and support remain essential.

Performance-based learning places significant demands on staff. Rehearsal cycles, production timelines, and community engagement require careful scheduling and ongoing attention to collaboration time and teacher workload.

The program benefits from strong community partnerships, but these relationships require ongoing nurturing. Continued collaboration with arts educators, feeder programs, and local artists strengthens pathways and ensures continuity.

Finally, long-term sustainability relies on stable staffing and leadership. Planning for instructor transitions, mentoring new faculty, and protecting program knowledge will help maintain consistency and quality over time.

Opportunities for Improvement in the Next School Year

Short-term opportunities include strengthening feeder programs and expanding partnerships with local arts organizations. There is also interest in developing a technical and production arts strand that would involve students in lighting, sound, design, and stage management, creating new entry points for students.

Alternative Delivery Methods

Several delivery approaches could increase flexibility and access, including evening or intensive block offerings, regional collaborations, and expanded mentorship opportunities with local and postsecondary arts organizations. Continued connection with ArtSpring and visiting artists would keep students engaged in current professional practices.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Program Effectiveness

Program effectiveness is monitored through student performance quality, engagement levels, and community feedback. The annual collective creation at ArtSpring serves as a key measure, demonstrating growth in technical skill, collaboration, and artistic expression. Alumni achievements and ongoing community support also provide meaningful indicators of long-term impact.



It was wonderful to speak with the class about my musical journey... it made me hopeful for the up-and-coming musicians on their way to becoming professionals themselves.
— Wesley Hardisty, professional musician & guest clinician

Engagement



Part Nine - Engagement

Parent and Community Involvement

Parents and community members are integral to GISPA, contributing through mentorship, production support, and participation in events. Families volunteer during performances, assist with logistics such as concessions and transportation, and help with set-building, costuming, and promotion. These partnerships foster shared ownership and pride in student achievement.

The broader community plays an essential role as both audience and supporter. Performances at ArtSpring Theatre routinely sell out, reflecting a deep connection between GISPA and the cultural life of Salt Spring Island and the Gulf Islands. Outreach, workshops, and performances on neighbouring islands further strengthen ties among students, families, and residents through shared artistic experiences.

Featured Parents: Melinda and Stephen Ford

GISPA, more than ever, is vital to our community. Not only has our family's experience with GISPA been wonderful, the program offers a meaningful opportunity for students—like our daughter—to explore who they are through the arts, to express themselves in movement, creativity, and teamwork. High school has the potential to emphasize grades and standardized paths, but GISPA stands out as a program where that path can be measured in an alternate setting, through a different lens. A program like this allows artistically driven students to bring their own subjective reality to school with them and keeps skilled and passionate teachers employed who want to nurture those perspectives. As we look ahead to an uncertain and shifting world, GISPA feels more vital than ever. In a time where technology and AI are advancing, the one thing that will remain uniquely human—and hardest to replicate—is true art. It is absolutely vital that GISPA remain funded, and even expanded if possible.”

— Stephen & Melinda Ford, GISPA parents

Communication of Program Results

GISPA communicates outcomes through both formal and informal channels. This report and potential regular reviews provide the opportunity to update the Board of Education and the District Education Committee on highlights of student learning, performance excellence, and community engagement.

Public performances provide compelling evidence of success, demonstrating depth of learning, technical proficiency, and creativity. High attendance and strong audience feedback consistently affirm program quality. News coverage, social media, and visual documentation further amplify student accomplishments. The annual production serves as both a culminating assessment and a celebration of achievement.

Partnerships and Collaborations

GISPA maintains strong partnerships that connect students to the professional arts world. Relationships with performing artists, postsecondary programs, and arts organizations provide authentic mentorship and advanced learning opportunities.

A key partnership is with the Dance West Network, a regional organization linking emerging artists with established professionals. Through this collaboration, students have worked with choreographers and artistic directors such as Wen Wei Wang and Joshua Beamish. The Community Dance Connector role, currently held by Robbyn Scott in partnership with ArtSpring and formerly by GISPA alumna Aina Yasué, creates an active bridge between GISPA, Dance West Network, and the wider artistic community. Alumni such as Aina Yasué continue to contribute to professional dance networks in Vancouver and across the province.

ArtSpring is committed to supporting professional outreach by touring dance companies, especially when their funding includes community engagement components, and works closely with GISPA to facilitate this outreach.

In recent years, GISPA music students have also worked with a variety of producers, audio engineers, composers, arrangers, and performing artists. Past collaborators include Dawn Pemberton (vocalist), Mike W.T. Allen (saxophonist/composer/arranger),

Part Nine - Engagement

Rodney Sharman (composer), Adam Iredale-Gray (producer; Juno-nominated band Aerialists), Zoe Guigueno (bassist; GISPA alumni), Christian Fabian (bassist/composer), Jamie Wollam (drummer for Tears for Fears/audio engineer), and Jacques Mindreau (violinist/composer).

Each year concludes for GISPA Musicians with a professional recording session in a studio, where students work with an audio engineer to create high-quality demo tracks. They prepare their pieces

in advance and record individually or in small groups to a metronome in an isolation booth, mirroring professional studio practice. Students also participate in post-production processes before tracks are released.

These partnerships ensure that GISPA remains deeply connected to its community while providing students with inspiring, real world artistic experiences. They affirm GISPA's role as both an educational program and a cultural institution that bridges school, community, and the professional arts.

Featured Educator: Sonia Langer

A career highlight was the Kidd Pivot Project 2014. Tour director Brent Belsher had worked with ArtSpring and GISPA a few times with regional outreach dance projects linking GISPA youth and several professional dance companies. Out of his work with GISPA, he connected Crystal Pite's company Kidd Pivot with GISPA for a 3-day event that included GISPA dancers, GISS dancers, young dancers from the local dance studio, and adult dancers from the Salt Spring and Victoria community. (Crystal Pite is pictured right, working in the GISS Dance Studio.) Company members from Kidd Pivot each worked with a group to convey a Pite choreography. The project culminated in over 40 dancers performing an original piece of choreography on the ArtSpring stage. Since Crystal Pite herself has one of the largest names in Contemporary Dance, this sure was a career highlight to have her and her dancers work with us for 3 days. What an experience!



Program Specific Questions



GISPA does a great job of constantly wanting to better the curricular outcomes and make changes to help better the program any way they can... recognizing and acknowledging various historical events and contemporary issues within our work.

— Xzana Nesbitt, GISPA alumni;
SFU Theatre



Part Ten - Program Specific Questions

Enhancing Students' Knowledge of Diversity and Anti-Oppression

GISPA provides a learning environment where diversity, equity, and inclusion are living values rather than separate initiatives. The program attracts students from a wide range of backgrounds, identities, and experiences, creating a space where belonging, expression, and acceptance thrive. Many students who have felt marginalized in traditional settings find in GISPA a place where their voices, stories, and perspectives are celebrated.

Through collective creation, students explore themes of identity, justice, and empathy. The creative process encourages critical reflection on systems of privilege and power, while allowing students to express lived experiences through performance, composition, and choreography. Productions often include student-generated material that examines identity, resilience, and social awareness. A recent example is the production of *Billy Nothin*, which explored identity and transformation. One student, returning to a former elementary school as the lead performer, described the experience as healing and empowering.

The program also challenges traditional hierarchies in the arts. By creating original work rather than reproducing prescribed performances, students resist rigidity and exclusion often associated with classical training models. In doing so, they engage in a form of anti-oppression practice that values multiple ways of knowing, being, and creating. The program honours individuality, neurodiversity, and gender diversity, cultivating empathy and deep understanding through the shared creative process.

GISPA teaches that diversity is not simply represented on stage; it is lived in the ensemble, embedded in rehearsal, discussion, and performance. Students learn that inclusion is not an outcome, but a practice grounded in curiosity, respect, and authentic connection.

Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Relevance

GISPA integrates Indigenous ways of knowing and being through pedagogy, creative process, and community connections. The program aligns with the First Peoples Principles of Learning, emphasizing reflection, interconnection, story, and the importance of learning through experience and relationship.

Featured Educator : Aina Yasué

Despite the critical and overwhelming urgency to create tangible ways to incorporate and honour Indigenous protocol and worldviews, the tools we have access to are limited and in a developmental phase. One way education can take concrete steps towards decolonial (or at least anticolonial) curriculum design is to place embodied knowledge, including dance, music and theatre, as holding equal importance to the academic disciplines. From my experience as a SD64 student from K-12, I believe that commitment to non-Western pedagogies and ways of knowing is an intentional decision that can become the difference between a student feeling self-determined and pro-active about learning or not. Knowledge must be understood as located in the body and communicated in multi-faceted and diverse ways, including the dancing, singing and storytelling body. GISPA is a critical step toward embedding Indigenous worldviews into public education by understanding the performing arts as more than an extra-curricular activity but as an invaluable skill that non-Western value systems view as carriers of knowledge that cannot be substituted or replaced.

— Aina Yasué, GISPA alumni; international scholar; PhD Student at World Arts Cultures and Dance program, UCLA

Part Ten - Program Specific Questions

Circle practice, collective creation, and intergenerational mentorship are foundational elements that mirror Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning. Students explore creation stories, archetypes, and myths that highlight reciprocity, belonging, and the interconnectedness of people and place. Learning in GISPA is relational and holistic, engaging mind, body, and spirit, and emphasizing personal and communal well-being.

The program maintains active relationships with Indigenous students and families and values representation that exceeds school averages. Through collaboration, students learn to listen, share, and understand diverse worldviews. Productions often include work inspired by place, memory, and story, connecting the creative process to the lands and waters of the Coast Salish Peoples.

Faculty and students engage in ongoing learning about the local territories, languages, and histories of Coast Salish Peoples, and invite dialogue that deepens awareness and respect. These practices are not added to the curriculum but embedded within the way the program learns, teaches, and creates together. On a recent trip to the Canadian Music Centre, the director of the program, Sean Bickerton, spoke about the CMCs efforts in reconciliation, especially as the program has been rooted in western music practices for so long. They are connecting with local Indigenous composers and expanding their idea of performance practices, notation and composition. It is inspiring to see how a program so rooted in colonial practices is making significant changes to their overall structure.

Additional Reflections

GISPA demonstrates the transformative potential of arts education in fostering empathy, belonging, and deep learning. It offers a model for how schools can create environments that honour individuality while strengthening community, inviting students to explore creativity, identity, and collaboration in

meaningful ways. The faculty remain committed to strong district relationships and welcome continued collaboration, visibility, and support from district and board leaders. Classroom visits and performances provide a clear window into authentic, student centered learning and highlight the program's confidence in its vision and contribution to public education.

Featured Leader: Councillor Solomon Reece

My people teach that the stars are the campfires of our ancestors, and in a similar way GISPA shines bright for many young artists. Having artists as parents taught me that the value of the arts is in how they ask us, challenge us, to view the world in different ways.

I understand, through my family's multi-media mask dance company, the importance of interdisciplinary practice. As the artist does for us, so do artists do for each other: expanding understanding, opening imagination, and deepening appreciation for the many forms of human expression.

In this spirit, I hope GISPA continues to shine for future generations. It is a bright star in our scholastic constellation, and a vital place where young people learn to see the world with curiosity, courage, and heart.

— Councillor Solomon R. Reece, The Key First Nation; GISS Alumni

Looking ahead, GISPA continues to evolve with a clear awareness of the staffing, sustainability, and equity considerations that accompany a program of its scale. With thoughtful planning and continued attention to these areas, GISPA is well positioned to demonstrate what is possible when expertise, passion, and collaboration come together around a shared purpose, and to remain a model for integrated, experiential learning within the Gulf Islands School District.



GISPA is a unique program that is nearly unmatched in British Columbia. Combining elements of music, dance, theatre and literary arts enabled me to gain a much deeper and holistic understanding of the performing arts.
— Junan Adam-Gordon, GISPA alumni, Environmental Leadership Canada

Feedback Summary



Part Eleven - Feedback Summary

Feedback Summary

Feedback was collected by the School District as a part of this review process. Below is a summary of the themes found in the feedback, with representative quotes for each theme.

Belonging, Identity & Safe Community

Students and families consistently describe GISPA as a place where young people feel valued, seen, and supported, especially those who struggle in traditional academic settings. GISPA offers a deep sense of community, emotional safety, and identity formation. The ensemble-based model cultivates acceptance, trust, and confidence, helping students develop strong social-emotional wellbeing.

Quotes:

"GISPA was sometimes the only reason I would go to school... It gave me a reason to show up and to graduate." — Jo Gaffney, alumni

"GISPA provided him with an accepting, diverse, and supportive peer group... an opportunity to be welcomed and valued for who he truly is." — Jo Twaites, parent

Mastery, Rigour & Advanced Skill Development

Submissions highlight GISPA's high expectations, advanced training, and professional-level standards. Students develop strong technical proficiency in dance, music, and theatre, supported by expert teachers, feedback cycles, and authentic performance requirements. Alumni repeatedly attest that GISPA prepared them for post-secondary study at elite institutions.

Quotes:

"GISPA was the single most productive course I took... the amount of information and how it's given allows for a remarkable increase in ability year after year." — Mischa Emiliano, alumni

"I arrived at one of the world's top drama schools more prepared than most of my peers... because of the depth of training in GISPA." — Fiona Pirie, alumni

Creativity, Original Work & Collective Creation

GISPA's defining feature is its emphasis on original, student-created work. Students collaboratively devise productions that integrate choreography, composition, and theatrical storytelling. The program nurtures artistic independence, creative risk-taking, and authentic expression, skills that alumni note are increasingly rare in traditional arts training.

Quotes:

"Every aspect of the final performance... the concept, the costumes, the songs, the stage, the movement—was original." — Tara MacLean, international recording artist
"GISPA teaches you how to create your own performances... to let the art become what it wants to be, not force it." — Xzana Nesbitt, alumni (SFU Theatre)

Collaboration, Teamwork & Leadership

GISPA's ensemble structure requires students to work across disciplines, negotiate ideas, develop shared visions, and build collective responsibility. These experiences develop leadership, communication skills, and adaptability. Submissions emphasize that the collaborative demands of devising original work mirror real-world artistic processes and workplace skills.

Quotes:

"We had to work together with thirty young voices in one room... defending ideas, cooperating, compromising." — Fiona Pirie, alumni

"Working in such a team... negotiating personalities, visions, and motivations is excellent preparation for life in our modern world." — John Whitelaw, parent

Mental Health, Wellbeing & Confidence

Parents and students describe GISPA as a stabilizing force that supports wellbeing, confidence, and resilience. Many note that the program helped them or their children overcome anxiety, isolation, or disengagement from school. The safety and structure of the ensemble fosters emotional growth and self-belief.

Part Eleven - Feedback Summary

Quotes:

"Through battling mental struggles... the only reason I showed up each day was the accountability and community in GISPA." — Dashelle-Taylor DeBruin, alumni

"It pushed her past her preconceived limits... she surprised herself with her strength of determination and personal growth." — Emily and Ryan Hunwicks, parents

Post-Secondary & Career Pathways

Dozens of alumni attribute their acceptance into competitive arts programs and their professional careers to GISPA. The program's mentorship, technical training, and professional exposure prepare students for diverse artistic fields, acting, dance, music, design, film, and beyond.

Quotes:

"I wouldn't be where I am today—on Broadway—without GISPA." — Zoe Guigueno, GISPA alumni; professional musician (Hadestown)

"These skills were practical assets in my career as an artist... GISPA was foundational to everything that came after." — Alex Kink, alumni

Community, Cultural Impact & Reputation

GISPA is widely described as a cultural cornerstone of the Gulf Islands. It enhances community life, attracts families to the region, strengthens ArtSpring's role in youth arts, and contributes to the island's artistic identity. Community leaders emphasize that the program enriches the cultural ecosystem far beyond the school.

Quotes:

"GISPA contributes to the cultural vibrancy of our entire community... to lose it would be to lose one of the most distinctive arts programs in BC." — Howard Jang, Executive & Artistic Director, ArtSpring

"GISPA is a great source of pride in the community... it brings families to the island." — Tara MacLean, international recording artist

Equity, Inclusion & Access

GISPA creates access for students who may not thrive in traditional academic environments, including neurodivergent learners, marginalized youth, and those from economically constrained backgrounds. The program reflects and advances inclusive practices, Indigenous ways of knowing, and cultural diversity.

Quotes:

"This program is critical in honouring Indigenous worldviews... performing arts are carriers of knowledge that cannot be replaced." — Aina Yasué, alumni; MA (SOAS), PhD student (UCLA)

Exposure to Professional Artists & Real-World Standards

GISPA immerses students in professional artistic environments through workshops, masterclasses, field trips, and collaboration with visiting artists. These experiences build confidence, discipline, and an understanding of industry expectations.

Quotes:

"Meaningful connections with professionals gave us opportunities we could never have on a small island... it opened up the world." — Aina Yasué, alumni

"Students rose to professional standards... treated like professionals, encouraged but no-nonsense." — Zoe Guigueno, alumni, Broadway musician

Program Uniqueness & Irreplaceability

GISPA is consistently described as unlike any other high school program in BC. Its interdisciplinary, original-creation model is considered rare, pedagogically innovative, and impossible to replicate within standard arts courses. Community partners emphasize that losing the program would mean losing a defining cultural asset.

Quotes:

"Nowhere else does a high school create original, interdisciplinary work of this calibre." — Susan Bertoia, theatre artist & UBC adjunct professor

Gulf Islands School of Performing Arts – Program Overview

December 10, 2025

Program and Financial Information

	Current Year	Previous Year	Considerations
Per student funding	\$9,015	\$8,915	How do we support Arts across the District?
Per student funding per block	\$1,127 (at 8 blocks per year)	\$1,114	
Teacher average FTE	\$120,000	\$120,000	
Teacher average FTE cost per block	\$15,000	\$15,000	District class size average for grades 8-12 is 22.7 FTE students.
Minium student FTE to cover class teacher cost ¹	13.31	13.46	
Class size of current year GISPA	5.7 (Drama 6; Dance 6; Music 5)	5.30	
Student funding generated per block	\$6,386	\$5,903	Is this the best investment of resources?
Teacher cost not covered per block	\$8,614	\$9,097	
Teacher cost NOT covered over the 3 blocks	\$25,843	\$27,292	
Additional program costs - surplus or deficit	Year not complete	-9,086	

12 Year Trend

Year	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 ²
Revenue	\$45,350	\$35,735	\$37,075	\$27,475	\$38,000	\$22,775	\$18,613	\$22,000	\$32,775	\$16,500	\$23,836	\$25,500
Expense	\$48,425	\$45,367	\$45,291	\$32,809	\$43,753	\$20,548	\$16,284	\$25,679	\$36,014	\$23,553	\$32,922	**\$8,226
Surplus / Deficit (-)	\$- 3,075	\$- 9,632	\$- 8,216	\$- 5,334	\$- 5,753	\$2,227	\$2,329	\$- 3,679	\$- 3,239	\$- 7,053	\$- 9,086	\$17,274
Calculated # Students	30 FTE	24 FTE	25 FTE	18 FTE	25 FTE	15 FTE	12 FTE	15 FTE	22 FTE	11 FTE	16 FTE	17 FTE

¹ Only covers district cost of a teacher and not any other facilities, administration, or related district expenses.

² as of December 4, 2025

Recommendations:

1. GISS to conduct a comprehensive review of its Arts program in Spring 2026, assessing available offerings, student participation, and facilitating a whole-school discussion with staff and students to determine the most effective methods for delivering Arts programming.
2. Conduct a district-wide discussion regarding the Arts Program, focusing on strategies for celebrating and promoting the arts throughout the district while looking to equitable participation for all ages and locations.



SD64 Personal Device Usage in Schools

December 10, 2025

Ministerial Order/
Provincial Standards

Policy Statement - Personal Digital Device
(Cell Phone) Restrictions in Schools

Provincial Standards for
Codes of Conduct Order

Gulf Islands
SD64
Administrative
Practices

Schools - Codes of
Conduct

AP A13 - School Code of
Conduct Checklist

AP L2 - Student Use of
Personal Devices

Schools Codes
of Conduct

To promote online safety and maintain focused learning environments, use of personal devices is not permitted except in...

- special circumstances: accessibility, accommodations, medical or health needs
- teacher discretion - instructional purposes or learning support tasks to enhance learning engagement and understanding

Digital Literacy

- Safer Schools digital literacy support resources, virtual sessions schools and families
- Digital literacy provided through PHE (Physical Health Education), CLC, REAL 8 & 9 curriculum, Career Education, English Studies, Law
- District Technology teacher and SLP in-service training, supports
- Provincial training (SETBC) for specialized software - AAC device
- Digital literacy instruction as per curriculum
- Information/info Bulletins to parents throughout the year

Application
of Tools

- Research projects
- Class websites, blogs, posts for sharing
- Assistive technology (speech to text, magnifier for vision support)
- Communication tool eg. TouchChat
- Videos/photos for assignments/ projects
- Medical - diabetes monitoring
- Accommodations - music for self-regulation
- District devices for literacy instruction and research,
- Fieldwork - eg. plant identification
- Podcasts on school-related projects, assignments
- Online learning platforms; digital classroom platforms (TEAMS and Microsoft 365 tools)

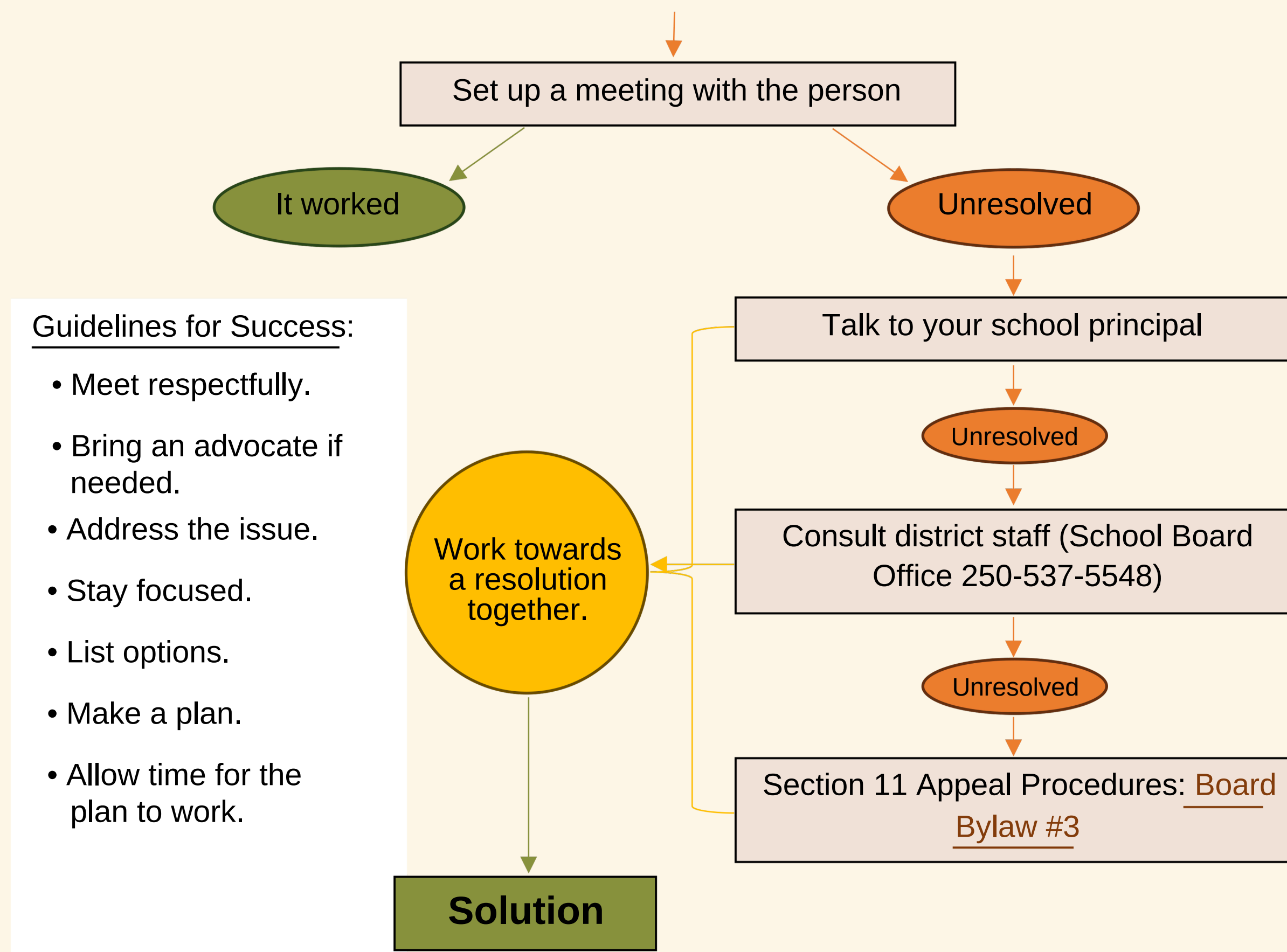
Addressing Concerns

Addressing Concerns – a guide for parents and guardians

Education is shared between the home and the school, and good communication is an excellent starting point for resolving an issue. Families are urged to contact the school if they have questions about their child's learning or any other specific concern.

Concerns or complaints are best addressed in a manner that reflects mutual respect and generally at the point closest to where the concern first arises.

I have a question, complaint, or concern about my child. Who do I contact?



It is important to give each step a chance to correct the issue before proceeding to the next step. At any time in the process outlined above, a parent or guardian has the right to appeal a decision that significantly affects the education, health or safety of their student (Bylaw #3 Section 11 Appeal Procedures).





BC DOGWOOD DIPLOMA GRADUATION CHECKLIST

REQUIRED COURSES | 80 CREDITS MINIMUM

13 Core (52 Credits) | 7 Electives (28 Credits Minimum)

At least 16 credits must be at the Grade 12 level

GRADE 10

- ☐ English First Peoples 10 or English 10
- ☐ Math 10
- ☐ Science 10
- ☐ Social Studies 10
- ☐ Physical Health Education 10
- ☐ 2 Electives

GRADE 10, 11, 12

- ☐ Arts Education 10, 11, or 12 or
Applied Design, Skills and Technologies
(ADST) 10, 11, or 12
- ☐ Career Life Education
- ☐ Career Life Connections

GRADE 11

- ☐ English First Peoples 11 or English 11
- ☐ 3 Electives

GRADE 11 OR 12

- ☐ a Math 11 or a Math 12
- ☐ a Science 11 or a Science 12
- ☐ a Social Studies 11 or a Social Studies 12

GRADE 12

- ☐ English First Peoples 12 or English 12
- ☐ 3 Electives

PROVINCIAL GRADUATION ASSESSMENTS

- ☐ Numeracy 10
- ☐ Literacy 10
- ☐ Literacy 12 (2020/2021)



Explore
Learning First Peoples
Classrooms Resources

fnesc.ca/lfp



Indigenous Education Report

November 2025

Recent Activities

Student Engagement and Cultural Learning

The Culture Club was launched during lunchtime, offering students opportunities to engage with crafts, art supplies, and snacks in a welcoming environment. This initiative supports cultural learning and helps foster a sense of community among students.

To further district literacy goals, literacy games were introduced during school visits, providing students with enjoyable and educational experiences. The Indigenous Support Team continues to make regular visits to schools, sharing Coast Salish stories, language, and sports such as hockey and lacrosse, thereby enriching students' cultural understanding and engagement.

A temporary Indigenous Education Administrative Assistant was hired for two hours per week to assist with program needs.

Cultural Learning from a Rights Holders (Coast Salish) Perspective

On September 22, a professional development session titled *Decolonizing Education* was held with Brad Baker in the WSANEEC school district. The session focused on storytelling, food sovereignty, and literacy. On October 17, the VI Regional Uy'shqawaluwun Gathering took place in the Cowichan school district, featuring activities such as storytelling and spear fishing. On November 4, a WSANEC 13 Moon workshop was conducted by language teacher Menetiye, further supporting cultural learning in the WSANEEC school district.

Connecting with the Land

At Saturna School, Elder Carl Olsen gave a presentation on Clam Garden restoration, which played a key role in encouraging two new Tsawout students to join the SEEC program. The "Youth On the Land" (YOL) initiative saw strong participation from Grade 8 and 9 students during the October outing, although senior student turnout was lower. The theme for these outings was Building Relationships, with activities including a walk to the Garry Oak Restoration project, Wetland Restoration project, and learning about the significance of Middens.

The November Youth on the Land outing saw increased participation, with 19 students from Grades 8 to 10, and 11 students from Grades 11 to 12. The focus on building relationships continued through active involvement in the Lahal Bone Game.



Student Voice and Post-Secondary Exposure

In September, a survey was distributed to gather student perspectives on well-being and academics. The results of this survey will inform the development of the new SD64 Enhancement Agreement.

Two Indigenous students attended Camosun College Indigenous Learners Day, where they explored trades programs.

School Highlights

Gulf Islands Secondary School

Gulf Islands Secondary has integrated Indigenous and Western worldviews into its Anatomy & Physiology classes through land-based learning opportunities. The Vice Principal is considering the introduction of an Indigenous science course for student credit.

Salt Spring Elementary

At Salt Spring Elementary, a Grade 6/7 teacher secured a grant for land-based learning, enabling a trip to Xwaaqu'um with the Stqeeye Learning Society. The Grade 4/5 class completed a group land acknowledgement and is moving towards personal acknowledgements. The school is actively seeking a local knowledge holder to provide instruction in drum-making and song.

Fernwood Elementary

The Grade 4/5 class is reading *Speaking Our Truth* to spark discussions about reconciliation. Kindergarten and Grade 1 students are exploring harvest celebrations, the 13 Moons, Coast Salish art, and traditions, integrating Indigenous stories into their math and art lessons.

Fulford Elementary

Fulford Elementary's principal is planning a creek restoration project that will incorporate Coast Salish water teachings, with funding secured through a local grant.

Younger classes are continuing Indigenous teachings with a focus on land stewardship, storytelling, and basic language skills. Older students are studying the 13 Moons cycle, mapping traditional names, learning HUL'QUMI'NUM, and researching Indigenous archetypes and legends. School-wide initiatives include daily HUL'QUMI'NUM language welcomes, Indigenous flag design, drum-making workshops, welcome pole carving, and displaying Indigenous artwork throughout the campus.



Walking Together Day (November 7)

Despite the cancellation of the keynote speaker, the event was successful due to the team's ability to quickly adapt. The highlights included a welcome song by Maiya Modeste (Quwutsun), presentations from Tsawout Elders Carl Olsen and IEC representatives Verna Ellsworth and Jeanine Cooper on education and cultural responsibility, and talks by Maiya Modeste, Tyee Joseph, Stacy Mitchell, and Superintendent Jill Jensen on Anatomy and Physiology and Two-Eyed Seeing. In the afternoon, Carl Olsen spoke on Clam Gardens restoration and food sovereignty. A survey reflection was distributed to SD64 staff following the event.

Looking Ahead

If budget permits, there is interest in hiring a new art and storyteller (part-time) from Quwutsun to visit schools and support cultural programming. Additionally, there is a desire to hire a part-time Elder in Residence for the high school to further strengthen Indigenous education and cultural connections.

Planning for the new SD64 Enhancement Agreement is underway, emphasizing data-driven change, student voice, and the essential contributions of both student voice and IEC members. The current agreement expires this year.

KNOW: Truths, Reparation and Restoration

We commit to learning the truths of our history in this place (colonially known as the Southern Gulf Islands, British Columbia, and Canada) and to taking action to support healing and the restoration of Indigenous knowledge systems, land, language, and culture. We walk together, alongside each other in humility and respect, with the rightsholders of this place. We recognize that racism and colonization continue to exist, and collectively, we will address the impacts of colonialism that perpetuate inequity of outcomes for Indigenous learners in our district. We commit to educating non-Indigenous learners so that, as they move through the world, they uphold truth, listen, challenge inequities, and are prepared to stand as allies. We acknowledge that our understanding and perspectives have been shaped by the systems we hope to change. To truly transform education, we need to challenge what we think we know and be prepared and willing to honour Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and being. This is a step towards meaningful action, restoration, reparation, and healing.



“Walking Together” Day | Summary of Feedback

Overview

“Walking Together Day” brought together staff, Elders, and local knowledge holders to deepen understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, land stewardship, and reconciliation. Participant feedback highlights meaningful learning, community connection, and opportunities for growth.

The day was described as meaningful, especially for its focus on Indigenous knowledge, land stewardship, and authentic community connection. Most participants rated their experience positively, with many expressing appreciation for the opportunity to learn from Elders, local knowledge holders, and each other.

Key Themes

Indigenous Knowledge & Land Connection: Many highlighted learning about clam bed restoration, traditional Indigenous foods, and the importance of sustainable practices. The stories and teachings from Elders were especially valued.

Community & Authenticity: Participants noted the power of showing up with open hearts, honoring identity, and fostering coherence within the learning community. Staff appreciated spaces where everyone is seen, heard, and valued.

Environmental Stewardship: The destruction of trees in Goldstream and the impact of highway expansion on salmon were discussed, inspiring calls for activism, stewardship, and student engagement.

Practical Integration: There was interest in embedding Indigenous knowledge into teaching and curriculum. Calls for hands-on learning and collaboration with local experts.

Key Insights

Aggregated responses reveal several key insights and reflect a collective desire for meaningful action, authentic connection, and sustained support in the journey toward truth, reparation, and restoration.

- There is a strong commitment to continue learning about Indigenous culture, history, and practices, with many expressing intentions to nurture relationships, invite local knowledge holders, and embed Indigenous teachings in their practice.
- The importance of Indigenous knowledge and its preservation is a recurring theme, emphasizing the need to teach, share, and sustain these traditions for future generations.
- Support needs include opportunities for collaboration, targeted training from Indigenous experts, and practical assistance to overcome systemic barriers, highlighting the value of ongoing dialogue and authentic engagement.

"Indigenous knowledge needs to be taught and shared—what happens when no one is alive to share it?"

"It matters that we can show up as our authentic selves and have our identity honoured."

"Everything is connected. Go on a field trip to Goldstream...meet Carl Olsen."

"My ignorance is not defensible if I truly want to make this world a better place and walk on the path towards reconciliation."

Recommendations Based on Feedback

1. Increase opportunities for experiential, land-based learning and connection with Elders.
2. Provide targeted funding and logistical support for Indigenous programming and field trips.
3. Design future events with more interactive, participatory formats.
4. Ensure intentional inclusion of all staff, especially those from outer islands.
5. Offer professional development led by local Indigenous experts.

Next Steps

- Continue building/nurturing relationships with local Indigenous communities.
- Integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into curriculum and planning. Many plan to deepen their understanding of local culture, language, and history.
- Encourage activism and stewardship among students. Some intend to encourage activism around environmental issues, such as protecting Goldstream and supporting salmon habitats.
- Strengthen communication and support across the district. Calls for more opportunities to connect with Elders, local knowledge keepers, and colleagues across the district, especially for outer island staff.



Walking Together – November 7, 2025