

DASH in the Community

Two inspiring school stories from Ranch Park and Nala'atsi

Last month, DASH staff visited two [Healthy Schools Network](#) (HSN) schools to participate in healthy schools events and see initiatives in action!

Ranch Park Elementary School, SD #43

On May 3rd, Ranch Park Elementary School held its first school-wide Healthy Schools Conference. This all-day event provided multiple opportunities for students to engage in various healthy living sessions. The conference was structured with five 45-minute sessions for classes to circulate through, plus two keynote speakers.

Sessions, which were led by educators and partners, were divided into two strands, one for students in Grades K-2 and another for Grades 3-5, and students visited all sessions within their strand. The sessions were centred on aspects of the [Healthy Living Performance Standards](#) (HLPS), which included sessions on healthy eating (featuring smoothies), Zumba, [WITS](#), playground games, yoga, and [Action Schools! BC](#) orienteering.

The day began with the first keynote speaker, Olympic athlete Georgia Simmerling. Georgia shared the exciting story of her journey as a competitor in alpine skiing and ski cross, and her ambitions for the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia. Following lunch, the second keynote speaker, former Olympic runner Leah Pells, inspired Ranch Park staff and students as she spoke about goal-setting.

Students were vibrant and excited throughout the Healthy Schools Conference. The varied sessions provided many learning opportunities for students to gain knowledge and skills to support their overall well-being, while also being inspired and excited about their health!

Nala'atsi Program – Aboriginal Education School, SD #71

On May 14th, DASH staff visited the Nala'atsi Program, an Aboriginal Education School in the Comox Valley. This HSN school, under teachers Toresa Crawford and Jackie Lever, has been focusing their efforts on healthy eating with an emphasis on indigenous foods, food sustainability through their school garden and healthy eating lessons using the services of a dietitian.

The visit at Nala'atsi started with a student-led tour of their school garden, which focuses on sustainable indigenous gardening. The garden includes indigenous vegetables and plants, berry bushes, fruit trees, a greenhouse, smokehouse, composting system and mason bees. The students play a very active part in maintaining the garden, earning science credits through a course taught in the garden by Jackie Lever, Métis teacher and Garden Program Director. Jackie has created a hands-on program that not only engages

the students, but gives them a sense of ownership and greater belonging in the school. The students apply their learning, such as research projects on indigenous and invasive plants, to support the growth of the garden.

The garden is part of a larger project created by Jackie to give students the opportunity to learn about traditional Aboriginal foods. Visual and written information about indigenous foods and healthy eating are being made available by Jackie on the garden website, so students can access tips and information on gardening and affordable healthy eating. As well, Toresa organized a partnership with local elders and the neighboring Friendship Centre. This has created many opportunities to build relationships, connection and community through projects that involve the elders passing on information by cooking with students and sharing traditional food knowledge. Cultural activities like the recent Big House event provide an experience for students, elders and community members to enjoy salmon cooked over the open fire, and pit cook vegetables and a variety of other traditional foods. [Click here](#) to learn more about the Nala'atsi Aboriginal Indigenous Garden.

Nala'atsi is also partnering with Grade 3 students from Courtenay Elementary School for peer-to-peer learning to teach young students about sustainable gardening. The students at Nala'atsi have learned new skills and are excited to be involved in this project. Some students have even begun to take an interest in their gardens at home! Click [here](#) to see the students working in their school garden.

In addition to the school garden, Nala'atsi is also focusing on sustainable healthy eating through a partnership with Erin Rowsell, a local dietitian in the Comox Valley. As one of the HSN schools, Nala'atsi addressed this topic through their inquiry question:

Will attending and participating in 10 school visits with the dietitian (who has a specialty in Aboriginal health) have a positive effect on the students' knowledge of, and participation in, a daily healthy diet and how to maintain it with limited funds?

In these 10 visits, registered dietitian Erin Rowsell has been working with the students to teach them about healthy eating and indigenous foods through engaging, informative lessons that provide ample opportunity for hands-on learning. Nutrition education is presented to students in bite-size chunks to help them better retain the information. A safe and welcoming environment is established in the kitchen and the students feel comfortable exploring new foods and learning new skills that support their wellbeing. With each lesson, students work with Erin to prepare a meal to serve to the staff and students at lunch. Eating together has strengthened school connectedness and created a strong sense of community! The visit at Nala'atsi ended by enjoying delicious salmon chowder with staff and students prepared by Erin and the students.

Stay tuned to learn more about this project through the HSN year-end report from the Nala'atsi Program.