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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

### **51ST SCHOOL DISTRICT SIGNS ABORIGINAL EDUCATION AGREEMENT**

DEASE LAKE – First Nations Chiefs from across a vast area of Northern B.C. joined representatives from the Stikine school district for the signing of an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, announced Education Minister George Abbott.

“This signing is the result of a tremendous amount of work by all the partners and an ongoing commitment to support Aboriginal student learning, achievement and opportunity,” said Abbott. “Bringing more Aboriginal history and culture into the classroom will benefit all students in the district.”

This new agreement has four main goals:

- To improve the academic success of all Aboriginal learners.
- To increase awareness and knowledge of Aboriginal history, traditions, culture and language; and to uphold and strengthen the inherent respect for and connection to the land.
- To improve the physical well-being of Aboriginal learners.
- To increase the sense of belonging, identity, and self-esteem in a caring and inclusive environment for all Aboriginal learners.

Encompassing over 188,000 square kilometres, the Stikine school district is, geographically, the largest district in the province. Large distances, within a subarctic climate, separate its isolated communities. In 2008-09, the Stikine school district had 215 Aboriginal students, making up 81.4 per cent of the total enrolment in the district.

The implementation of the agreement involves shared decision making among all of the participant groups and a commitment to work collaboratively and with trusting partnerships to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal learners.

The parties to the agreement are:

- Daylu Dena Council
- Dease River Band Council
- Iskut Band Council
- Tahltan Band Council
- Taku River Tlingit First Nation
- School District 87 (Stikine)
- Ministry of Education

“The signing of the enhancement agreement is a huge accomplishment for the district,” said Stikine board of education chair Freddie Louie. “Through collaborative partnerships, an agreement was developed that will not only promote and support the educational development of Aboriginal learners, but will also incorporate the wisdom and knowledge of their traditional culture in their day-to-day school life. Students will experience a sense of belonging, respect and safety within their school and community environments allowing them to develop a strong cultural and academic identity.”

School districts that have signed Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements have seen impressive results for Aboriginal students:

- SD 73 (Kamloops/Thompson) signed its second enhancement agreement in 2006 and the rate of Aboriginal students who graduated within six years of enrolling in Grade 8 increased from 46 per cent in 2004-05 to 57 per cent in 2008-09.
- SD 85 (Vancouver Island North) signed its enhancement agreement in 2005. The pass rate for students in Principles of Math 10 went from 60 per cent in 2004-05 to 81 per cent in 2008-09.

To date, 51 school districts have signed Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements. A number of districts have signed their second agreement. Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows and Campbell River have each signed their third agreement and Kamloops/Thompson is preparing to sign its third agreement.

Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements are just one component of the collaborative process that the Province is undertaking to improve Aboriginal student achievement. Others include the B.C. First Nation Education Agreement and the development of Aboriginal content for the K-12 curriculum.

The Ministry of Education is providing \$61.5 million (\$1,160 per student) in estimated funding for Aboriginal education in 2010-11. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and cultural programs, Aboriginal support service programs, and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

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