

Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement

June 2015 to June 2020

Okanagan Indian Band
Vernon and District Métis Association
First Nations Friendship Centre
School District 22 Vernon
Ministry of Education



The rose bush is indigenous to the Okanagan territory. The First People, our captikw, refers to creation of the First Peoples. (Harry Robinson, compiled by Wendy Wickwire, 1989, *Write it on your Heart*, The epic world of an Okanagan storyteller)

Our Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement has five important parts...

First, we wish to acknowledge the work and learning that has occurred in Okanagan territory for our Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

Second, following Indigenous protocols, we want to introduce the partners.

Third, we explain our task in creating the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

Fourth, we write about our journey.

Fifth, we present our goals, with rationale and community recommendations for each goal.

We believe our process of creating our Enhancement Agreement and the Enhancement Agreement are of equal importance.

We want to acknowledge that we live and learn in the territory of the Okanagan peoples. We recognize and respect the opportunities we have for learning in Okanagan territory.

We are excited to share our Enhancement Agreement!



Who we are...



Okanagan Indian Band

The Okanagan valley is only a portion of the traditional territory of the Okanagan People or Syilx Nation. The Syilx territorial boundaries stretch from Mica Creek, north of Revelstoke, south to Wilbur Washington in the United States of America. The eastern boundary of the territory is Kootenay Lake and to the west, the Okanagan share a border with the Nlaka'pamux Nation in the Nicola Valley.

“S-Ookanhkchinx” or Okanagan translates to mean “transport toward the head or top end,” which refers to the people traveling from the head of the Okanagan Lake to where the Okanagan and Columbia Rivers meet. In other words Okanagan Lake and Okanagan River were the traditional transportation routes of the people and their traditional boundaries encompassed this area.

From time immemorial, the Okanagan utilized the land to provide food, supplies and shelter. Like other First Nations across North America, the Okanagan developed a deep connection to the land that still exists today. Despite geographical challenges, the Okanagan lived as a united people. Traveling throughout their traditional territory, the Okanagan reaped the benefits of the land through hunting, fishing, growing and gathering. Intertribal trade was also an important part of the Okanagan existence. As horses arrived in the territory, the Okanagan quickly adapted to the new technology and horses remain an important part of daily existence.

Today, the Okanagan are comprised of seven “bands” in Canada and the Confederated Tribes of Colville: Upper Similkameen Indian Band, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, Penticton Indian Band, Westbank First Nation, Osoyoos Indian Band, Upper Nicola Indian Band and the Okanagan Indian Band.

Members of the Okanagan Indian Band still maintain many of the cultural practices passed down through the generations and despite past governments best efforts to destroy the Okanagan language, programs like the Okanagan Indian Band Language Nest and the nkmaplqs i snmamayath ikl sqilwxtet Cultural Immersion School are introducing the youngest members to the language.

OKIB Quote: “In 1915, Harry Harris became the first Okanagan Indian Band member to attend public high school in Vernon,” said Chief Byron Louis of the Okanagan Indian Band, “With our membership’s participation in the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement; it is a great first step towards a future full of greater collaboration and greater student success for everyone.”

*see Reserves of the Okanagan Indian Band map on page 14



Vernon and District Métis Association

The Vernon & District Métis Association (VDMA) was formed in the early 1990's. The VDMA has signed a Charter Agreement with Métis Nation British Columbia. The Existing Board of Directors was elected into office in November of 2013 for a four year term. The VDMA has over 900 Métis within our communities and 411 MNBC card holding citizens. The VDMA is registered in good-standing under the BC Society Act (S-0060443).

The Vernon and District Métis Association Board of Directors and Metis citizens work very hard to preserve Métis culture, language and heritage. The mission of the Vernon and District Métis Association has four goals: (1) to bring together the Métis community within Vernon and surrounding area, (2) to teach the culture of the Métis people and further the knowledge of our culture and heritage within our Métis youth, (3) to show how proud we are as Métis, and (4) to give respect to our elders. The Vernon and District Métis Association is excited to be involved in the creation and implementation of the Enhancement Agreement.



The First Nations Friendship Centre

The First Nations Friendship Centre, School District #22, Métis, the Okanagan Indian Band and Families are in support to develop and facilitate academic programs for success and positive self-esteem through cultural awareness for Aboriginal learners. To achieve this, we will utilize our community resources and community individuals who carry the traditional values of their First Nations ancestors who are willing to share their knowledge with us. This way, children from those Aboriginal communities who are enrolled in School District 22 will benefit from learning the true history and strengths of First Nations people. The timely and full implementation of this plan can help to ensure that Aboriginal youth develop a strong sense of belonging within schools that will contribute to their academic success.



School District 22

School District 22 (Vernon) resides in the territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) people and serves approximately 8,100 students in the communities of Vernon, Coldstream, Lavington, Lumby, and Cherryville. The district's one goal is "100% success rate for all students." There are 14 elementary, 5 secondary, and 5 alternate programs in which over 1,100 Aboriginal students are enrolled. Aboriginal students self-identify as members of the Okanagan Indian Band, the Vernon & District Métis Association, Inuit, and other nations from across Canada. SD 22 is committed to excellence in Aboriginal education and to providing the programs, services and supports that will allow our First Nations, Métis and Inuit students to excel.

Our Task...

Our task was to create an Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement for the Okanagan Indian Band, Vernon and District Métis Association, First Nations Friendship Centre, School District 22 and Ministry of Education.

An Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement is...

...an agreement between Aboriginal peoples, the local school district and Ministry of Education. With the guidance of the Ministry of Education, the Aboriginal communities and school district together develop goals to enhance Aboriginal students' success. The goals may include: academic, language, culture, identity, history and territory. The input gathered through community engagement with all partners will respect the voice of all participants.

Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements are developed for a five year term. Goals are assessed regularly to track progress and be adjusted as needed. The school district is responsible for ensuring the continued involvement of all partners in implementing the agreement. Overall, the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement provides a direction needed to improve the success of all Aboriginal students.

Ministry of Education states Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements:

- are intended to continually improve the quality of education achieved by all Aboriginal students;
- support strong cooperative, collaborative relationships between Aboriginal communities and school districts;
- provide Aboriginal communities and districts greater autonomy to find solutions that work for Aboriginal students, the schools and the communities; and
- require a high level of respect and trust to function.

(Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Branch, 2015)

Aboriginal Enhancement Working Group

In May 2014, the Aboriginal Enhancement Working Group was formed. Representatives from local Aboriginal communities and School District 22 formed the Working Group. This included representatives from the Okanagan Indian Band, the Vernon & District Métis Association, and the First Nations Friendship Centre. The Working Group's role was to represent their members at the meetings and to share information back to their membership about the process of creating an enhancement agreement. This ensured that all partners have a voice in developing the agreement. In this agreement the term, "partners", refers to all Aboriginal leadership and community members and all SD 22 Board of Education and employees.



Our Journey...

From the beginning and throughout our journey we believed in the importance of acknowledging and honouring the Okanagan peoples, language, territory and history.

The importance of using a wholistic approach which focused on relationships, interconnectedness and how people work together was mentioned early in meetings with the Working Group and in conversations with members of the local Aboriginal communities and School District 22.

Therefore, building relationships and communicating “in a good way” became a theme to guide our work and the design of our Enhancement Agreement. The Working Group also identified early in our process that our Enhancement Agreement is a framework for all partners to collaborate over the next five years. We have a living document that will continually evolve to meet the needs of our Aboriginal students.

Guiding Principles

In our first meeting, the Working Group collaborated together to create guiding principles for the working group. The guiding principles are:

- To create an awareness of the importance and need for an Enhancement Agreement in SD 22.
- To be inclusive of everyone’s voice to promote a sense of belonging.
- To respectfully gather community voice to determine what success looks like for our children.
- To identify programs & services, for example mentorship, for all students to be properly prepared for post-secondary education with a positive personal and cultural identity.
- To clearly communicate the successful completion of the Enhancement Agreement.

The first few months of our work together involved building relationships within the community and gathering information to inform our process. The chair, vice-chair and members of the Working Group attended many community meetings hosted by the Okanagan Indian Band, the Vernon and District Métis Association, and the First Nation Friendship Centre.

Community Engagement and Communication

In the early Fall of 2014, we invited all Aboriginal peoples in the region and all members of School District 22 to participate in information gathering sessions. The leadership, Elders, Grandmothers and community members from the Okanagan Indian Band, the Vernon and District Métis Association, and the First Nations Friendship Centre shared their experiences, stories and ways to enhance Aboriginal student success. All administrators, members of the Vernon Teachers’ Association, and members of CUPE from School District 22 were invited to participate.

We followed a qualitative research approach, which means we collected narratives in a personal, respectful manner that honoured the participants’ experiences and voices. We invited Aboriginal students, parents, Elders, Aboriginal leaders, and School District Employees to meetings to answer the question “What does success look like for Aboriginal students”? At the meetings community

members agreed about the shared responsibility with all partners to develop and carry out the Enhancement Agreement.

Meetings for community input were developed with individual schools and Aboriginal communities. Communication notices were sent out via: SD 22 website, OKIB website & Facebook, postings at FNFC, Vernon & District Métis Association, and The Morning Star local newspaper.

We gave community members a variety of ways to participate: in person, by email, by phone, and/or with hand written input, respecting 'their choice' to contribute at this time. We sent out an invitation via the SD 22 call-out system to all parents/guardians of Aboriginal students (approximately 1200) to give input for the Enhancement Agreement on the school district website. Parents and community members used all methods to give input.

Community Engagement Results

We held meetings for students, parents and staff in five secondary schools, fourteen elementary schools and in Alternate Programs for an average of two to three meetings per school. To increase participation by parents, community meetings were held at the: Okanagan Indian Band, First Nations Friendship Centre, First Nations Employment Services, Vernon and District Métis Association, and Vernon Native Housing. In total we held more than fifty Community Engagement sessions with an estimated attendance of 1200+ participants.

The Working Group reviewed all comments from the community to look for key themes and to begin to draft goals. The Working Group also discussed metaphors that capture the significance of the Enhancement Agreement. The metaphor of the rose bush, from the Okanagan story of how the First People were created (Robinson, 1989) was chosen as a metaphor, which could be developed further as our Enhancement Agreement is implemented. The draft goals were shared with the leaders of the Aboriginal communities in late March and with Elders, community members, and school district employees. At our April 2015 meeting the Working Group reviewed the draft agreement. Further revisions were made following feedback from working group members and the Ministry of Education.

Planning and Progress

As a living document we will continually seek input from all partners, respecting everyone's voice and their ownership of developed goals over the next five years. Also, to honour people's voices, all working documents and community input have been archived for future reference. The planning and progress of our Enhancement Agreement will be developed through partner collaboration during the first year. School District 22 is responsible for ensuring the continued partner involvement in implementing the agreement and the Director of Aboriginal Programs will guide and support this work. As the end of the five year period approaches, all partners will develop a new Enhancement Agreement by re-engaging and planning for a full review of goals and Aboriginal student needs.

Our Goals...

The knowledge gained from the numerous meetings from the Aboriginal and School District 22 communities has been carefully embodied into four goals.

Our goals reflect the importance of relationships, interconnectedness and collaboration. Our goals are respectful of who is involved, what they will be able to do and how they will do it. The goals provide a framework for our living document for the next five years. In our goals the term, “partners”, refers to all Aboriginal leadership and community members and all SD 22 Board of Education and employees.

Goal 1: Increase Aboriginal student success through improving communication and understanding of the Enhancement Agreement in School District 22.

Goal 2: Increase the knowledge and understanding of the culture and traditions of Okanagan people and Aboriginal peoples for all students, parents, community members, and School District 22 employees.

Goal 3: Aboriginal students will believe in themselves and be proud of their Aboriginal heritage and identity.

Goal 4: Aboriginal students will have a strong vision of who they want to be.

Goal 1: **Increase Aboriginal student success through improving communication and understanding of the Enhancement Agreement in School District 22.**

Rationale: We acknowledge our shared responsibility and commitment to this goal to ensure that all goals in our Enhancement Agreement are achieved. It is vital for all partners to increase their understanding of the Enhancement Agreement. As well, it is essential for all partners to understand how the Enhancement Agreement connects to the Local Education Agreement and District Accountability Framework. This will facilitate an improved learning environment for all students by creating opportunities for students, families, and communities to build relationships to enhance education for Aboriginal student success. We are dedicated to information sharing. We acknowledge that we will be stronger if we work together for our common belief in our students. Community engagements have led us to the following recommendations:

- Community Recommendations:**
- Improve networking and communication between all Aboriginal communities and SD 22 to develop strong relationships.
 - Improve the channels of communication with Aboriginal parents, families or caregivers in a way that works for them, e.g. Digital (email, text, other) or physical (letter, person-to-person)
 - Improve communication with Aboriginal parents, families or caregivers about Aboriginal services and programs and student successes and challenges.
 - Improve direct communications between the Aboriginal parent and teacher, between teacher and teacher, as well as between administrators and other support staff regarding Aboriginal students' needs and success.
 - Ensure language used within the district reflects, and accurately represents, the value of Aboriginal peoples within our community. For example, adjusting the title "Aboriginal Support Worker" to change perceptions of the role of Aboriginal Support Workers.
 - Ensure all employees and community members are aware of the appropriate terminology to use when referring to Aboriginal peoples. For example, the official term, *Aboriginal*, is used in Canada to refer to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people.
 - Ensure that all Aboriginal community members and SD 22 employees know about the Enhancement Agreement and how it is connected to the other contracts.

Goal 2: Increase the knowledge and understanding of the culture and traditions of Okanagan people and Aboriginal peoples for all students, parents, community members, and School District 22 employees.

Rationale: We live and learn in the territory of the Okanagan people. We acknowledge our shared responsibility and commitment to the education and recognition of the diversity of people in our communities. The increased understanding by all partners will result in students and families feeling more welcome in the district. Also, by learning about one another's cultures, all members of the district and Aboriginal communities will respect the relationships and commonalities we all share. Community engagements have led to the following recommendations:

Community Recommendations

- Create opportunities for all students and staff to learn about the language, history and traditions of the Okanagan people and the diversity of Aboriginal cultures within our school district.
- Create opportunities for all teachers to include Aboriginal language and culture into classrooms, with a focus on N'syilxcen as the primary Aboriginal language taught.
- Connect with existing Aboriginal activities and practices, such as, food security, cultural teachings and territory.
- Empower students, rather than enabling, by providing more opportunities for student leadership where students can get credit.
- Develop Community Youth programs for student leadership outside of the school district.
- Increase awareness of Aboriginal protocols, customs and teachings by involving Elders in our programs.
- Find creative ways for classroom teachers and Aboriginal teachers to collaborate on teaching Aboriginal culture in classrooms and Aboriginal ways of learning.
- Create welcome signs to the territory of the Okanagan peoples at SD 22 Board office and schools.
- Create opportunities to have traditional artwork, regalia, and ceremonial items at school district events such as opening day events, holiday celebration and graduation ceremonies.
- Increase Aboriginal school projects and student learning in every classroom.
- Increase awareness of Aboriginal activities in schools and in community through mutual channels of communication, such as, school websites, newsletters and community communication.

Performance Indicators:

Indicators will be carefully chosen through partner collaboration during the first year of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. The data will be collected, analyzed and reviewed to inform our partners about the progress and to inform on future implementation decisions.

Goal 3: **Aboriginal students will believe in themselves and be proud of their Aboriginal heritage and identity.**

Rationale: We believe that all Aboriginal students need to know who they are and where they come from, in order to know their path for the future. Throughout their school years, Aboriginal students have a right to learning opportunities that empower them to feel connected, capable, responsible and proud. We acknowledge our shared responsibility and commitment to promote our connection to heritage, language, culture, community, and land. Students, parents, teachers, and community members support the belief that knowing one's heritage and identity is important for success. Community engagements have led to the following recommendations:

- Community Recommendations**
- Create opportunities to increase cultural safety in students' learning environment by training administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and students in cultural safety.
 - Improve and increase resources for Aboriginal heritage and culture in all curriculum areas.
 - Work towards ensuring that every school has a Welcome room throughout the school district to promote a sense of belonging for Aboriginal students in their school.
 - Create opportunities in "Welcome Rooms" for all students in the school population For example: invite a friend.
 - Continue to improve the services for all Aboriginal students in every school.
 - Continue to provide opportunities for all students to learn Okanagan (N'syilxcen) language.
 - Increase the relationship and transition between the Okanagan Immersion program for students, staff and families and SD 22.
 - Increase the successful transition for all students between early learning, elementary, secondary, post-secondary and trades.

Performance Indicators: Indicators will be carefully chosen through partner collaboration during the first year of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. The data will be collected, analyzed and reviewed to inform our partners about the progress and to inform on future implementation decisions.

Goal 4: **Aboriginal students will have a strong vision of who they want to be.**

Rationale: All students need a strong vision of who they want to be to create their own future story and to walk on their own path. K-12 education is one part of the pathway for Aboriginal students' vision for the future. Transitioning through the K-12 system requires a wholistic approach that meets each student's intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual needs. This was evident through the engagement process as Aboriginal students expressed the need for more career preparation and mentorship. We also need to ensure that students, parents and partners have a clear understanding of the relationship between course and program choices and the impact they have on future opportunities. Community engagements have led to the following recommendations:

Community Recommendations

- Create opportunities for every Aboriginal student to have a strong connection with two adults or role models.
- Work collaboratively with partners to provide services to Aboriginal students during their early years.
- Know each student well, to build strong relationships of trust.
 - who knows this student well? Who is their 'go-to-person'?
 - create staffing schedules that provide opportunities to know students well
- Build supports from knowing them well.
 - food security, school supplies, career selection/programs and cultural activities
- Look at ways to expand on current programs for career preparation.
 - more visits from mentors and role models
 - more visits from College and University advisors
 - more hands-on time with trades people
 - increase awareness and training for school counsellors to support Aboriginal students with career planning
- Provide students awareness of the local, regional, and national socio-economic conditions for employment.
- Explore more ways to teach work ethics, time management, and being responsible.
 - develop community home work programs (neighborhood)
 - develop a check-in program with students once a week
- Find ways to strengthen the relationships with families and improve parent/guardians involvement.
- Celebrate success of Aboriginal students.

Performance Indicators:

Indicators will be carefully chosen through partner collaboration during the first year of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. The data will be collected, analyzed and reviewed to inform our partners about the progress and to inform on future implementation decisions.

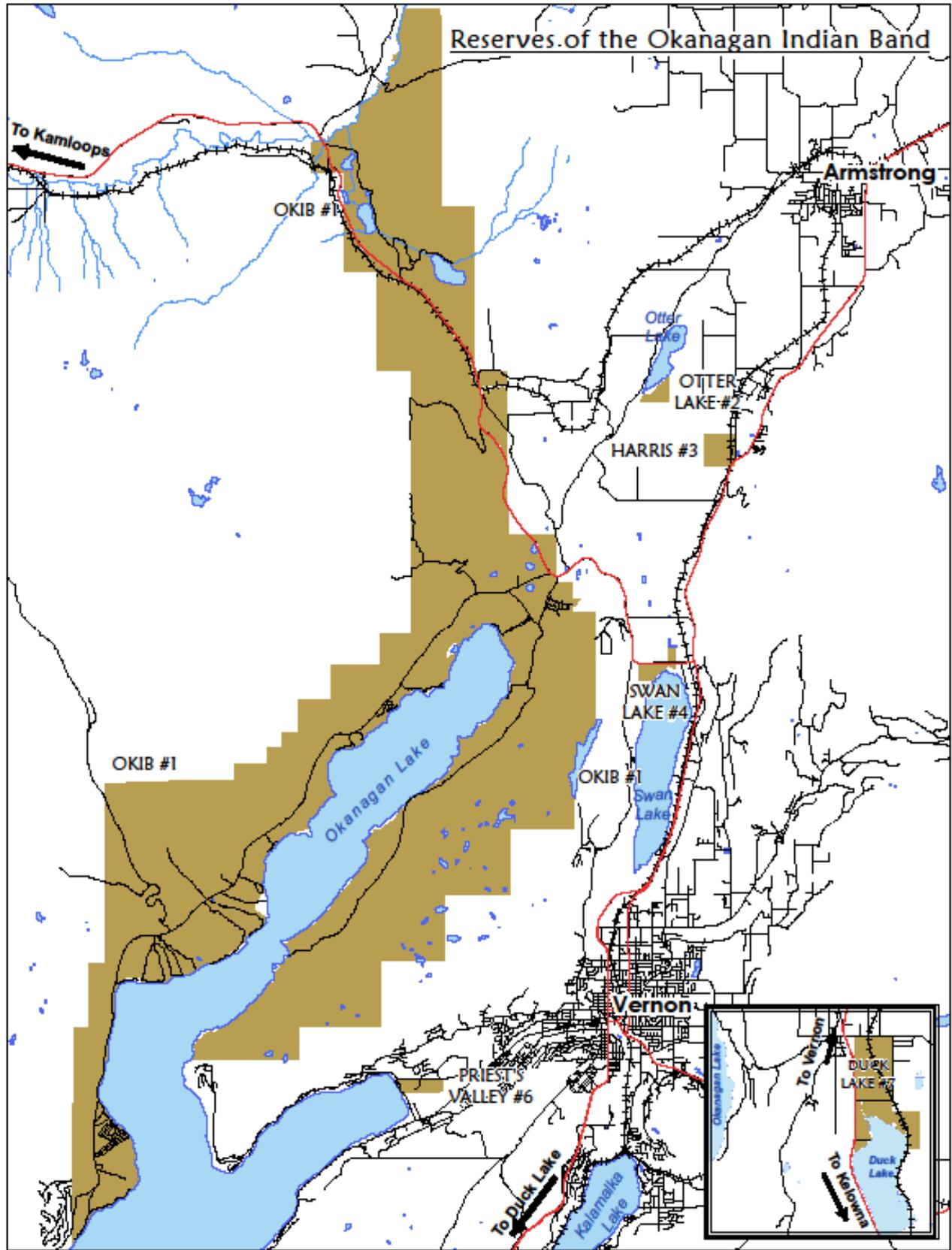
Acknowledgements

The Aboriginal Enhancement Working Group would like to thank the Aboriginal students, parents, Elders, leadership, and SD 22 Board of Education, Administrators, teachers, support workers and members of the community who contributed to this agreement. We would also like to thank The Ministry of Education, Okanagan College, University of British Columbia – Okanagan, Literacy Junction, First Nations Employment Services, and The Vernon Native Housing for their support. Special acknowledgement go to Colleen Hannah, Enhancement Agreements Coordinator, for all her support, guidance and dedication to us and to all of our Aboriginal students throughout BC.

We wish to acknowledge and thank the members of the working group for their commitment and dedication to the task:

Jami Tonasket, Chairperson, Okanagan Indian Band
Colleen Larson, Vice-Chairperson, Vernon District Métis Association
Bill Turanski, Past Chairperson, School District 22 Board of Education
Kelly Smith, Chairperson, School District 22 Board of Education
Joe Rogers, Superintendent of Schools, School District 22
Diane Louis, Elder and Education Committee representative, Okanagan Indian Band
Victor Antoine, Elder, Okanagan Indian Band
Val Chiba, First Nation Friendship Centre
Valerie Richards, Vernon District Métis Association
Sandra Lynxleg, Aboriginal Principal, School District 22
Jackie Kersey, Principal, School District 22
Monica Lloyd, Director of Instruction, School District 22
Valerie Poppleton, Vice Principal, School District 22
Lynn Jameson, Executive Assistant, School District 22
Ben Louis, Aboriginal Teacher, School District 22
Joelle Belanger, Teacher, School District 22
Kathy Morgan, Aboriginal Support Worker, School District 22
Vicky Raphael, Aboriginal Parent and Teacher, School District 22
Lenaya Sampson, Aboriginal Student, graduated from School District 22
Allan Louis, AEC representative, Okanagan Indian Band

Reserves of the Okanagan Indian Band



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Memorandum of Agreement
Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement
June 2015 - June 2020
Between
Okanagan Indian Band
Vernon and District Métis Association
First Nations Friendship Centre

And

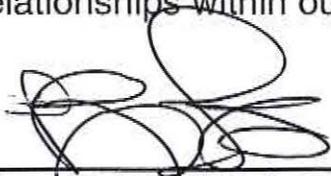
School District 22

And the

Ministry of Education, Province of British Columbia

We, the undersigned, in recognition of our shared responsibility to enhance education of all Aboriginal students in School District 22, agree with the terms of this Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

Our Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement articulates our intent to strengthen relationships within our community to enhance learning for all Aboriginal students.



Okanagan Indian Band
Chief Byron Louis



First Nation Friendship Centre
President Chris Davies

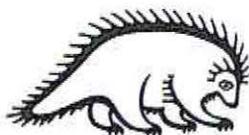
Vernon & District Métis
Association
President Vince van
Wieringen



SD # 22, Board of Education
Board Chair Kelly Smith



Ministry of Education
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