

## **School District 92 (Nisga'a)**



**Gingolx Community Forum on  
Education Visioning April 27, 2009**

The Community Forum was organized to provide an opportunity for the community of Gingolx to talk about education. Members of the Education Vision Committees, Steering and Advisory, attended to witness and record what was being said. Ultimately the purpose of the forums is to provide grounds on which to express a written *Vision* for education that will guide the Board of Education in its educational purpose and planning.

Eighty (72) Gingolx residents along with the Committee guests attended the meeting held at the Church Army Hall from 6:00 – 10:30 PM April 27. A panel consisting of an elder, youth, parent, and NLG representative got the ball rolling as they each responded to the question;

**“What is the purpose of education in Nisga’a society today and in the future?”**

### **Panel**

#### **Parent:**

- Currently, we have a white system. We were taught the way the white man does things; the western way; what we are doing now is hearing about western European history and socials. We should be learning about our history and culture.
- NESS primary grades are incorporating Nisga’a culture within the curriculum. The school district is moving in an awesome direction.
- Why are we learning western civilization when we don’t know our own history?
- We have a PALS program in the school—how awesome the PALS program is.
- Birth to 6 years old is the most crucial years in a child’s life—children are like sponges during this time. My child is learning Spanish from Dora the Explorer. Why don’t we have “Nisga’a Street” instead of “Sesame Street”?
- I’d like a vision of unification of all the villages. Right now there is no interaction among the villages...things are too territorial.

#### **Youth:**

- This is our system.
- We should embrace learning our Nisga’a language and culture through total immersion at NESS. It’s the only way we can grow strong again
- Our language and culture are vital to our survival as Nisga’a people.

- Either we aren't listening when our elders speak or we don't care.
- We should pay attention to traditional guidance from our uncles.
- Our culture is dying out – not learning about feasts – young people don't have strong understanding of why feasts take place.”
- Our feasting system should be taught; we need a strong understanding of why we do things; our adaawak should be taught. We should know the roles and duties of our aunties and uncles.
- We must have this learning before we can go out and attain western education to come back and work here.
- After we have learned out Nisga'a culture we can go into wider society, learn their ways and come back to our communities – various work forces in our society
- Nisga'a ethics—traditional guiding principles that govern how we do things—should be a mandatory class.
- Grades 10 – 12, we need a traditional course for all those students. If we don't know how to speak our language – don't know the laws about the feasts, we can no longer call ourselves First Nations
- We should bring this into the adult learning centres and for all students in grades 8-10; youth need to know the laws for our feasting system.

### **Elder:**

- It is sad that in gatherings like this that our Elders need to translate their Nisga'a so people will understand.
- Sad that our Nations' three and four year olds cannot speak our language. Grandparents should be teaching their grandchildren. Both my parents could speak Nisga'a. Parents taught us not to use our language – my father was laughed at for not speaking fluent English
- We should teach our little children—this should be done by the grandparents. There is no Nisga'a language taught in the Prince Rupert district. They are fluent when they speak their Tsimshian. Young people not understanding language spoken by elders. It's up to the grandparents – start speaking to the new born children.
- Education is important – Get education and come back to your community. Stress education for young people – need to have jobs available to them when they return to their communities. Important if we are stressing education.
- A lot of our people have gone out and gotten certificates and have come back. We need jobs for them.
- I went back to school and I didn't know it would be so exciting to go back and get my diploma.
- It's time for the younger people to tell the older people to go back to school.

- Education is important in Nisga'a society. We need to stress the importance of education for the older ones and the younger ones.

### **Nisga'a Lisims Government: Representative**

- Our platform is on the quality of life. We have four vision statements—one of them is “Learning is a way of life.”—education and experience. Could be education, could be how our government works, could be experience that gets you there. One is “Ensure a sustainable resource.” - start planning a vision statement for economic certainty and education – should come together
- Our government should help out by writing policy in support
- Education and economic certainty have to come together.
- We must always remind ourselves of our vision. The treaty gave us latitude.
- Our population is growing. There are hundreds more Nisga'a citizens now than when we signed the treaty, 6200 Nisga'a citizens (5500 when treaty was signed) There are 1200 Nisga'a between 5 years old and 15 years old—20% of our population. If we don't plan now, we'll have a crisis in health, education, housing...
- Need to look at where we need to go now and in the future
- First we need a vision, then we need operational statements.
- Things are still young (treaty) – like rebuilding an airplane in mid air.
- Education gets you to the choices when things are complicated. We're still young and we're still learning. Right now we have a benevolent autocracy
- The vision should also speak to the teachers.
- We have a shortage of skilled labour; we have a shortage of the professions—health, education, resource management—and we haven't prepared for this.
- Edu(cation) means ‘from within’; need to look at next step. Raising a child is a community responsibility; look at the child – it's like a mirror, quality of life is important for that child.
- We need a vision to express our Nisga'a identity today and in the future.
- Traditional values and guidance to guide our behaviours.

Following the panel discussion an excellently prepared traditional Nisga'a dinner consisting of tasty local foods was provided. Over dinner people at the table continued with discussions related to the panel question and then representatives from the tables were invited to the microphone to present what had been talked about; as well as personal comments.

### **Table Talk**

Comments from the tables and individuals:

- We need to educate the parents to be involved in their children's education. Parents need learning not the children. I went to residential school, fenced area. I was punished if found outside the fenced area. I don't see this today. We don't monitor what our children are watching on TV.
- Dropping out needs to be unacceptable.
- Children now learn about other cultures/societies. Youth need to be independent by their high school years.
- Early pregnancies-13 year olds; drinking at early age - it is alarming how loose the parents are with their children—parents are responsible for their children.
- Another failure – kids don't have plans before getting out of high school. Parents need to play an active role
- Youth need to learn to be leaders—to take part in your community life—in high school.
- Language and culture as a way of life, learning from aunties, uncles, and grandparents process food, how to survive
- We need survival skills—we don't know what is coming ahead—we have to be on our toes with our families.

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- Children are our future.
- I have learned a lot about our land and how to live on the land, and respect for the land. We need more activities on the land.
- Ages birth to 6 years old are very important. We need to have activities for them. All the learned behaviours start at home. They need to learn acceptance, quality of life. We should encourage children, praise them.
- Education does begin at home, teaching children right from wrong
- It hurts me when I see all the negative stuff in the community

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- I went to residential school and was in Vancouver; I returned without my culture. I lost my identity as a Nisga'a and this has made a big impact on me. I tried to fit back into my culture. Problems got bigger - alcoholism, found it difficult to fit back into my community. I was part of the Port Alberni case and helped identify dysfunctions. We needed to build self-esteem. I recognized what my children needed. The only way my children could learn self-esteem is through my own.
- We should be speaking Nisga'a to our children in the Head Start program.
- Healing and learning comes through our culture, language, courses, and feasts.
- Everything that happened in residential school effected the way I lived for a long time

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- We're afraid when we try to talk in Nisga'a that we'll make a mistake.
- Because of the residential school, it has taken this long to try to recover what was lost.
- I'm grateful to the elders for looking after those of us who didn't go to residential school
- The economic and the education are coming together. Can \$ be used to hire elders to teach the language from Headstart to grade 12?
- Elders need to teach our culture at school.
- We need a Nisga'a guidance counsellor to focus on language and culture.
- With our children going into NESS, they are traveling back and forth each week. How much energy do they have left then? How much have they learned? The residences in Aiyansh are being turned into offices.
- We should have the youth in the residences, separating boys and girls into separate dorms. Keep the students in the dorms for a month...this is better than traveling daily or weekly. "Smooching" at a young age. Keep them in group homes until weekends (ap- plause)
- Education starts at home, [it makes a difference] whether you speak to them in English or Nisga'a. Take an interest in your children at home. Speak to them.

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- The voice your children hear when they are very young is the language they'll learn.
- Baptism when a baby—your child will grow up to be useful.
- I was baptized in the Nisga'a tradition. They took my clothes off and laid me in a beaver pelt in the snow. Words of my grandfather: "Your child is going to be useful one day", one thing both grandfather said was: Don't forget Nisga'a language, Nisga'a culture.
- Residential schools got in the way.
- It took four years to learn my language (after residential school) it took 37 years to learn my language.
- When I moved my family to the city, I forgot to teach my children the Nisga'a language.
- Teach your children to understand your voice, it will stick with them. English or Nisga'a – teaching what Nisga'a is all about.
- The things I should have done years ago is what I'm doing with my great grandchildren.
- Today I have taught my children how to be respectful to others. I failed to teach my children Nisga'a. I continue to forget to teach them Nisga'a language and culture. I am now teaching my great grand children language and culture
- We used to teach the children everyday the lord's prayer in Nisga'a
- These are some of the things I have grasped from tonight's panel. I will continue to help others who want to learn. Why are we not playing our Nisga'a games? – We are still doing research on the games we had.
- Advise and encourage the young people to pick up and learn where you left off in your Nisga'a language. This is the language of our people since time immemorial all must come together hand in hand to keep the Nisga'a language alive no matter how low it gets.
- Unification, culture, total immersion

- Education begins at home open the doors of the young people of the Nation

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- We need unification of all four communities
- We need culture, immersion, discipline.
- What you learn at home, you bring to schools.
- We need to ensure them jobs.
- We need a grade 12-like exam in Nisga'a 12, to be required to graduate.
- We need re-education about abuse and suicide intervention
- We need intervention for self-esteem.
- We need to ensure a healthy diet.
- We need Nisga'a cartoons and storybooks.
- Sad to see elders translating Nisga'a to English to toddlers
- Our culture is vital to our survival. Other nations have toddlers speaking their language. We should speak Nisga'a to the newborns.
- It takes experience to get you there.
- Education and economic certainty have to come together
- We need to plan for the future. There are no Nisga'a studies in the Social Studies courses.

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- Regarding the daily bus run—the community voted for this, the community has to make the decision to change this in the winter.
- We need to use 'tough love' with our youth and children. Learn to say "no" to our kids.
- Put them in group homes during the week

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- We need 'tough love' and curfews. My children know they are not out after supper. They aren't allowed to use bad language, to swear, or to bully...if they do they are grounded. They are in school, active afterwards, and they earn what they want.
- Parents have to take responsibility. I believe education starts at home. I've done my best to teach them the few Nisga'a words I know. I'm looking forward to having more of the culture in the curriculum.

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- The school is named after my father. Today is the day we want to bring our culture back. I commend parents who try to keep up with the culture
- I admire that we want to bring our culture back. On TV, our kids are learning French and Spanish...why not Nisga'a?
- Kids pick up from cartoons so quickly – why not Nisga'a cartoons?

- We depend on others too much, we need to take responsibility. 70 people here today (it) says we are concerned about our education.
- Why didn't we take the kids to the smoke house when the Oolichan were running and start talking to them in Nisga'a and telling them about what we're doing? We could have a course in preparing our food.
- This year we were fishing on the ice...the first time in my memory.
- The treaty is only 9 years old. We need treaty in the curriculum - could have Treaty 101 course.
- We need to fight and push for our own language in Rupert and Terrace
- We really want to see our own people in those group homes a man and a woman (*Applause*). This would change things significantly. We would have more attendance in the student residence if we had our own people there. .

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- Young children need to understand that education is very important in their lives. I left Gingolx for a number of years. I encourage all young people to pick up with education and stick with it. Research and bring games back – stick with our native games.
- Encourage parents to encourage their children to stick with them.
- Children cannot be in the feast but in mock feasts to teach them our traditions

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- Back in the 60s teachers just passed us to get rid of us. Academic expectations are better than none academic.
- Show grade 7s what to expect in grade 8 – spend one month in grade 8 before they get there
- Education starts at home. Need to start working together for our kids.
- Stay away from alcohol
- Care for everyone in the community.

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- Would like to see more of this in our community
- Teach younger generation to learn their language

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- Why are Nisga'a students so far behind? We want our schools to be up to the standard of Terrace and Prince Rupert.
- Both daughters were going to school in Terrace but transferred to Aiyansh; are way behind Terrace – 2years
- We need a vision for NESS
- Many teenage are pushing strollers. The family life program in Terrace used programmed baby doll to learn what it is like to look after a baby.
- Culture should be taught at home, not at school.
- Teaching culture in the school won't help you with education or getting a job – only in the community

- I love my culture but it is up to parents to teach our kids our own culture, not the schools. Teachers don't know our culture; how to harvest food and attend feasts. Sit down and listen to the speeches.
- We say we want our children to learn our culture but we don't want to teach it ourselves. Culture does not help you get a job out there.
- I was taught how to work when I was young. I would like to see our standards in NESS come up to those of Terrace and Rupert.
- Parenting course for teens.
- Today's parents are having a lot harder time than our parents.

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- I struggle everyday to teach them about the language and the culture. I am a visual learner. I learn from experience, my children are the same.
- It would be awesome to have Nisga'a PALS in the schools...and Nisga'a Talking Tables in the schools. Why not create a Nisga'a Johns [oral reading inventory]?
- Traditional trails – need to create them in our valley – have guides that speak only in Nisga'a.
- We can label the community in Nisga'a, have plaques in Nisga'a—eventually we will learn the words. We can label simple things. We can learn by doing things.
- Not one Nisga'a word in this building – need to label things e.g. tables, chairs.
- We need to get together, work together, to make the Nisga'a language survive.
- There are challenges to bringing Nisga'a language and culture to children at home.
- Need to make use of technology during the winter months. Use technology to present the curriculum to the child.

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- In the elementary grades, the Chase BC program gets parents involved...80% of the kids are speaking the language.
- Books in Nisga'a
- DVDs, cartoons
- Elders in classes
- We need to keep our good teachers. Look for ways to keep teachers here – they have created a very comfortable environment for kids
- The high school needs to be more creative in keeping kids in school—things like carpentry, mechanics, hair styling, drama, trades programs; driver's training; cooking training in the group homes
- Really happy with Group homes with more hands on for training for cooking.
- After graduation - we have a university in Aiyansh but nowhere to stay. At WVN there are no residences for young families so that people can take the programs

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- My vision is that all parents learn their first language
- The immersion in division 1 has been in position for 2 years now. They move to another class and don't speak they way they did in division 1.
- Cultural events: totem pole carving ceremony in Nisga'a language; all day cultural event last year, prepared traditional foods, gutted and cooked salmon
- Would like to see carving hosting and food preparation (traditional)
- We're lacking parent involvement; parents need to learn as much as they can about their language.
- Elder involvement, parents must approach elders and ask...seek the information.
- We get stuck, but we keep on trying.
- My vision for the future is that we all learn together to speak our language

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- I really liked what Lavita said about putting labels up. Lavita is a role model for me. We need role models.
- We need posters of our own people who have gone far - professionals wearing their crests, as an inspiration. No one seems to know who they are. A picture is worth a thousand words.
- It took 40 years for me to get a Nisga'a name; I felt incomplete without it. I didn't really feel like participating in Nisga'a until I got that name.
- Elders need to earn respect and should respect the youth. Our young people will push us into the future.
- We have to respect our young people, not be negative.
- Every day, education is key.
- You can't turn the clock back – computers are here to stay, need to learn how to use them.
- Need to see more role models

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- Holistically...spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally. There is one phrase I heard that is important—your child will grow up to be useful. This is our guiding light.
- Immersing into language and culture; start at home.
- All of the comments about immersion to keep our language alive. Immersion for parents with aunts and uncles—there is always someone willing to help. Find the people who are driven, are committed. – An inventory of our community. Embrace what we already have as a community. Look at how we can give instead of finding and looking for fault that's how we'll start to move forward, to grow.

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- Nisga'a language should be taught in Head Start.

- My sons were really excited when they made their drums, and so was I when I made mine.
- I'd like to see us all get together.
- Concerned with school my children are going to
- Never raised by my own parents without Nisga'a language and culture. Nisga'a language needs to be put into the Head Start. Elders also in the Head Start.
- Teachers need to learn our language. I understand our language but I cannot speak it.

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- Why can't we be able to get into the adult learning centre in the evenings, after 5:00pm? Why did they stop the classes in the evening?
- We could have spelling bees, math bees, in Nisga'a; pen pals among all our schools, so we will know each other when we get to the high school.

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- Came to the village after graduating grade 6 in Port Edward
- Read aloud to your children. Important for young parents to read to their children. Comprehension for me came easy because we did a lot of phonics. We should teach through phonics today.
- Used to be hands on, now you need certificates for everything –clean windows/wash floors. Now once we get certificates, we are too broke to move. Institutes are too expensive – transportation, gym, etc
- Keep on learning and then pass that learning on. Don't be stingy with your learning. Always have a helping hand with learning.
- Would like to see spelling B in Nisga'a
- Pen pals in all schools in the district
- CAPP grades 4-12

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- Youth leaders: preparing a proposal for a YOTS (Youth off the streets) program in Gingoix. Encourages students to make better choices – looking for community support.

**A special Thank You goes out to the Elders Committee and cooks for preparing a great meal with an abundance of traditional foods.**

**Door Prize Winners:**

Charles Moore Jr. \$450 Save-On-foods Gift Card

Neal Barton \$250 Petro Canada gas Card

Steven Doolan Jr. \$35.00 Tillicum Lodge Gift Certificate and Mug