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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

### **Aboriginal education is all about empowerment**

MISSION – Heritage Park Secondary school welcomed over 200 guests tonight to celebrate the signing of the Mission Public School’s second Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. The ceremony included student performances and drummers from the Leq’á:mel First Nations.

Since the district’s first Agreement was signed, the six-year completion rate for Aboriginal students in Mission has increased from 53 per cent in 2008/09 to 68 per cent in 2012/13. Overall, the provincial six-year completion rate for Aboriginal students has climbed to a record high of 59.6 per cent— a 41.6 per cent increase since 2000-01.

These agreements are one of the ways that government, school districts and Aboriginal communities are working towards reconciliation. Mission’s second agreement was developed over a two year period by the Enhancement Agreement Committee comprised of elders from the Siwal Si’wes Advisory Committee, the Mission Teachers Union, principals and parents. They focused on four themes for success: Meaningful Contributions, Positive Learning Experiences, Looking to the Future, and Honouring Culture and History. The themes are represented holistically through the teachings that are symbolized by the medicine wheel.

In the past year, Mission Public Schools has fostered positive improvements across all their Aboriginal programs. Halq’eméylem language instruction has been implemented at five elementary schools and one alternate program, with each participating student receiving a translated Halq’eméylem name. Long term plans include graduation language credits for secondary students.

The Siwal Si’wes Advisory Council—which has been in place for over 20 years— received a special accomplishment award at the 2014 District of Mission Community Services Award ceremony for their continued volunteerism. As well, the Siwal Si’wes Aboriginal Education program was awarded a \$20,000 Future Shop Tech Lab Grant, one of only nine grants across Canada. The district plans to utilize iPads to promote Aboriginal culture using the First Voices app.

#### **Quotes:**

**Chief Alice Thompson, Leq’á:mel First Nation &  
Councillor Justin Laslo, Councillor Leq’á:mel First Nation—**

“Our communities appreciate the acknowledgement of the traditional territories on which the

agreement is being endorsed. With this in mind it is equally important to state that Aboriginal culture and traditions are key in laying the foundation for how education will be delivered. This signing proves that when we collaborate and work together as a collective our chances of meeting or exceeding the expectations of this agreement can be a reality.”

**Peter Fassbender, Minister of Education –**

“Mission Public Schools continues to find success by embracing modern learning technologies, while championing the importance of Aboriginal languages. By signing the second Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, they’ve committed to continue to empower students on their path to graduation.”

**Eddie Heinrichs, chairperson Mission board of education –**

“Our new enhancement agreement has been created through the thoughtful work of an incredibly dedicated group of individuals who have embraced the process of consultation with all of our Aboriginal communities to ensure we have a plan for a brilliant future for our children. We have learned so much from this consultation process and we are eager to continue to share this knowledge within our school community. We have a core group of teachers, students, community members, parents and elders who are working to create wide spread systemic change and we are so tremendously optimistic that the goals of this agreement will be met and that we are at the next stage of a very special time for our Aboriginal students and our community.”

**Quick Facts:**

- Mission Public Schools is located on the traditional territories of the Kwantlen, Matsqui, Leq’á:mel and Scowlitz First Nations.
- The district has an Aboriginal student population of 901 which represents 15% of the total number of students in the district.
- Estimated provincial funding for Aboriginal education in the BC public K-12 school system is \$63.9 million for the 2014-15 school year.

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