



*Garibaldi student Hannah Beaulieu explores a local stream.  
Photo by Becky Maitland*

## First Of Its Kind Learning Model To Be Explored in SD42

Just what is an environmental school? For many, the first thing that comes to mind is some connection to nature and the outdoors. But that is just one of the components currently being explored as part of a recently launched five-year research project in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

**T**he Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) has awarded SFU's Faculty of Education, the District of Maple Ridge, School District No. 42 and community partners \$1 million to fund research on an environmental school project. The funding will be spread over five years and will enable SFU researchers to work with municipal and school district officials,

the Katzie and Kwantlen First Nations, and many community groups.

Elementary Vice-principal Clayton Maitland will play a key role in keeping all the project partners connected and working together. "It's exciting but it's a challenge as well; we have more than 15 community partners and each partner has their own ideas and connections." He emphasizes that there are five strands of pedagogy establishing what

the 'environmental school' might look like. Place-based education, Imaginative education, Inquiry method, Inclusion, and Environmental Education are the strands that are woven together to establish, "Place-based, Imaginative and Ecological Education." "We have many ideas about the kinds of learning we would like to see. The opportunities are being researched and curriculum is being developed through the help of

SFU and the community.”

Organizers are hoping that some kind of program will be in place for the fall of 2011 but it won't be a school in the traditional sense. While the environmental school will follow provincial learning outcomes, reaching those outcomes will involve a different path. The whole idea behind environmental or place-based learning is that students study and experience issues by going where they occur. So for example, lessons about different governance models might take place at council chambers or at the Katzie longhouse, while lessons around the arts might take place at The ACT. Clayton emphasizes that this is not about going on field trips: “you might be at a certain location for days or weeks, and while you are there, that location is the school, in context and experientially.”

A different kind of learning will require teachers with different skills.

The project partners have talked with the Maple Ridge Teachers' Association and local educators, to develop a certificate program for interested teachers and educators. Approximately 80 teachers have shown interest in the Environmental School Project's network and some have signed on for the certificate program. The Network will meet monthly every fourth Thursday throughout the school year.

Before an actual school could become reality it requires the approval of the Board of Education. Project members are currently working on a Memorandum of Understanding and program options procedure as part of the approval process. Essentially, they will need to demonstrate how the proposed school or program will work and how it will benefit learners, and they will need to show how their proposal matches district directions, priorities, policies, and core values, as

well as addressing staffing, financial, facilities, timelines, and evaluation issues. Finally, they will have to demonstrate that they have enough students and parents to establish and sustain the program. Clayton expects this process to be completed in November.

Parent support will be crucial. At this time there is a core group of committed parents who attend all the meetings plus a much larger group who are staying informed via e-mail. Once the approval process is complied with, a public education campaign will become the next priority. Display materials, video clips and their own website are just some of the methods organizers will use to inform parents, and to include them in the ongoing conversation about the Environmental School Project. If you want to be part of that conversation, contact Clayton at: [cmaitland@sd42.ca](mailto:cmaitland@sd42.ca) or 778-549-4620 &

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