

## Is the Maple Ridge Eco-School right for you?

### WE ARE DIFFERENT

Perhaps you are looking for alternatives to “regular” schooling. Perhaps you would like your child to experience a diversity of teaching styles. Perhaps you feel the environment is important and would like your child to learn more about it. These could all be good reasons to consider enrolling in the Maple Ridge Eco-School — but they don’t guarantee that it’s the best place for you or your child. We hope this brief introduction to how we work will help you determine in advance whether this is really what you are looking for.

### NATURE’S CLASSROOM

One of the big differences is that we spend a lot of time outside in the woods, rivers, parks, fields and wetlands of Maple Ridge – and we mean A LOT. This is nothing like regular school “field trips.” The students spend days working and studying in a particular location, sometimes using tents and tarps for shelter. Washrooms are occasionally available, but outhouses are more common. We are careful to keep kids warm and safe; however, they will spend significant time outdoors when it’s wet and cold. Proper clothes, good nutrition, and physical health are all important for students to benefit from what the Eco-School has to offer. On the other hand, we recognize that students may have had little experience of the outdoors, and we work with all kinds of students to help them become comfortable and confident in outdoor settings, and to develop the skills needed to flourish there.

### MANY TEACHERS

We believe the students benefit from learning from many other people besides classroom teachers. As well as learning from their peers in multi-age groupings, they build relationships with people who have spent their lives in Maple Ridge, who have unique knowledge of its plants, animals and places, who can share oral histories and traditions (including those of the Katzie and Kwantlen First Nations), who can teach the students particular skills and practices, and so on. We highly value participation by parents, grandparents, and other family members. Children at the school spend considerable time with these other kinds of teachers, in many different environments and settings, both natural and social; we believe that *places* are teachers as well. Of course, we make sure that safety and security are not compromised in these diverse learning experiences.

## **CURRICULUM PLUS**

The life of Maple Ridge, in its ever-changing diversity, is the basis for learning at the Eco-School. Students cover the provincial curriculum, but they are expected to learn a great deal more. Usually this involves not just reading or talking about a theme or topic that extends across the curriculum, but experiencing it in some way, exploring it actively, doing or creating something original, and contributing to the well-being of people and places. The values of service, responsibility, intrinsic motivation, and resilience are central to our teaching. We seek to develop students' imagination and resourcefulness; this often means challenging them more than they would be in other schools. Even the kinds of supplies they need from home will be different: instead of pencils and paper, they may be asking for wading boots, a magnifying glass and a jam jar. The school relies on grants and donations for most of its equipment; sometimes parents will be asked to help fill the gap between our resources and our needs.

## **A LEARNING COMMUNITY**

Families at the Eco-School are part of a community of learning and teaching that doesn't begin and end with the hours of the school day. That doesn't mean that you have to be available during the day, although we encourage the participation of family members in the teaching program. But we do try to build strong, caring relationships among our families, school staff, the SFU research team, and our many community partners. You will be asked to come to evening meetings, weekend events, presentations and shows by the students, and often to work and learn with your child in your own time, in ways that complement what is going on during school hours. We believe that the Eco-School is about families learning and flourishing together — and we need your commitment and dedication to make this happen.

## **NO RECIPES**

We are trying to find ways of educating our children and ourselves that make the most sense for the community and place of Maple Ridge. No one knows exactly what those ways are. We are committed to ongoing learning from other eco-educators in North America and around the world, but ultimately we have to try things out to see if they work here. Not everything will work equally well. Together we have to be prepared to take chances, ask hard questions of ourselves and others, and rethink things as necessary. As a family at the Eco-School, you will be part of this process of figuring out the kind of education we want, and growing and changing yourselves in the process.

## **TALK, TALK, TALK**

Working things out as a community means ... communication. If your child has special needs, all of us should know so we can think together about how to meet those needs. If you think the Eco-School should be doing something differently, you need to be prepared to voice your ideas and concerns and work with others to address them. A team of researchers from Simon Fraser University will be working with us to encourage deep questioning and learning from one another. We can also expect greater than usual scrutiny from the media, politicians, and Ministry representatives, both supportive and critical.

*PLEASE READ THE ABOVE CAREFULLY TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE A ECO-SCHOOLER BEFORE COMMITTING!*