



School District 84 - School Growth Plan

School Context:

Zeballos Elementary Secondary School (ZESS) is a K-12 school in School District 84. ZESS has a student population of 35 students and 33 of 35 (94%) of the students identify as First Nations. ZESS is a remote school, 42km on a gravel road from the highway and then 170km from Campbell River or 44 km to Port McNeil. There is significant internal support for students. In 2025/26 there are four classrooms with 6 teachers and administrators, 2 EAs, 1 YCCW, 1 Culture and Language Support, 1 admin assistant / library support member as well as a noon hour supervisor, bus driver and custodial staff. There is a counsellor working approximately half-time at the school, hired in partnership between SD84 and the Ehattesaht and Nuchatlaht Nations. ZESS receives behaviour therapy, speech and language, and occupational therapy support from outside organizations and these services have been consistent this year.

With small class sizes, ZESS students receive high amounts of personalized attention. Almost staff are multi-year veterans and this consistency has allowed strong relationships to be built between staff and students. ZESS builds opportunities for students at the school including a large garden and geodesic greenhouse, a weight room for high school students, and the most northern disc golf course on Vancouver Island. Through a partnership with the Ehattesaht Nation, the school offers breakfast and lunch to all students every day.

The Vancouver Island West School District acknowledges and gives thanks that we work, play and live on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Nuuchahnulth peoples, specifically the Ehattesaht, Ka:'yu:'k't'h/Che:k'tles7et'h', Mowachaht/Muchalaht, and Nuchatlaht Nations. We honour our relationship with these Nations and with all other First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples who reside in the territories we serve.

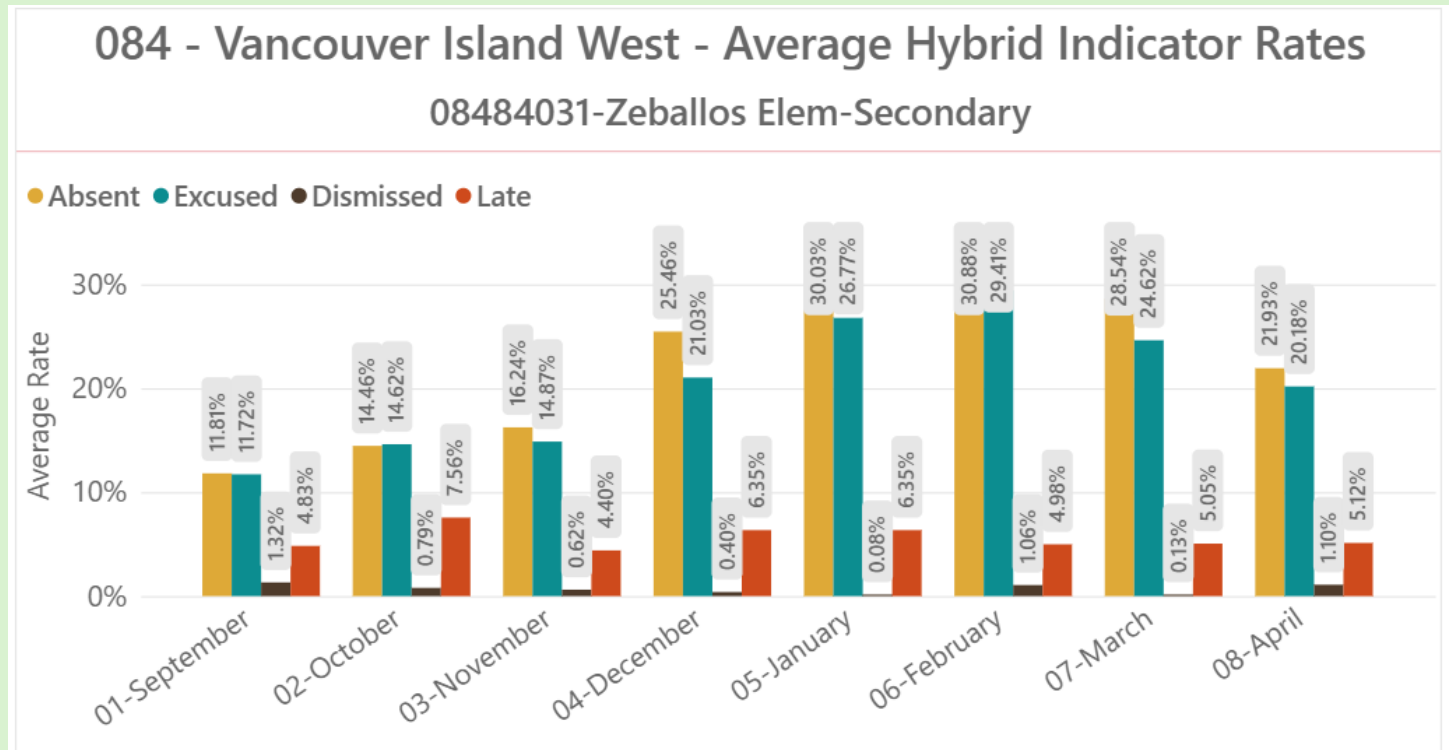
What is happening for our learners?

Students' reading is assessed in many ways including Early Reading profiles, PM Benchmarks, and the provincial Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA). These assessments show that reading rates compared to grade level expectations are near or at grade level in early elementary years and then decline by grade 7. This has been a trend for multiple years. As well, numeracy results from grade 4 and 7 FSAs show an increasing achievement gap as students reach higher grades compared to a provincial average. Taken together, this shows that as students get older, the progress of their learning is declining. One factor that likely affects student academic achievement is school attendance. Improving attendance will be an important part of supporting growth in literacy, numeracy, and student engagement.

In 2024/25, approximately 65% of ZESS students missed more than 10% of school days and 35% of ZESS students missed more than 20% of school days. At community consultation meetings including IEC and PAC meetings community members have expressed the need for increased academic expectations. One way that academic achievement may be helped is by having students in school more often. To assist accurately tracking attendance, in 2025, ZESS began entering reasons for absence into MyEd to better understand why students are away.

In 2025/26, ZESS began 20-day attendance challenges to increase attendance. Initial results suggested that this was working well in the fall with increased attendance over the same period in the preceding year. The attendance rate dropped off steadily over the fall and at the Christmas break was at similar level as the previous year. Based on recorded absence reasons, this is attributed to increased illness and parent approved reasons. Absence rates stayed high after the break.

Graph 1: Absences at ZESS for 2025-26



Annual Goal Summary

School Goals	SD84 Strategic Priority	Relevant SD84 Strategic Plan Goal
<p>Students will make one year of progress in both literacy and numeracy or as stated by their individualized IEP goal.</p>	<p>Learning</p>	<p>Every student achieves proficiency in literacy and numeracy.</p>
<p>Students will feel more connected to school through strengthened partnerships between ZESS and parents, caregivers, Nations, and community members.</p>	<p>Relationships</p>	<p>Strong partnerships develop with parents, caregivers, and communities.</p>
<p>Students will strengthen positive personal and cultural identity through regular participation in Nuu-chah-nulth language, art, song, drumming, dance, and land/community-connected learning. Students will be able to describe how these experiences connect to identity, belonging, and community.</p>	<p>Indigenous Ways of Knowing</p>	<p>Fostering students' sense of identity.</p>

Learning Goal

Goal Statement:

Students will make one year of progress in both literacy and numeracy or as stated by their individualized IEP goal.

Priority Alignment**Supporting Strategic Plan Goal:****Learning**

Every student achieves proficiency in literacy and numeracy.

Why was this goal chosen?

Assessments like PM benchmark and the early learning profile show that our students are late to develop literacy skills. Literacy skills are important because they empower individuals, reduce poverty, and enhance overall quality of life by increasing employability, health, and community participation. In the past, we have seen challenges especially with comprehension in older grades. This goal will help us focus on comprehension strategies with older students. This year's FSA results show that the majority of students in grades 4 and 7 are at an emerging level in numeracy. Report card marks and comments also indicate that most students are working at an emerging or developing level. Consistent tracking with numeracy skills is important for informing what teachers should teach next, informing the student where to focus their learning, and informing parents of student learning. By moving a grade-level forward in their learning in numeracy, students will be ready for high school level math and graduation.

Strategies to implement

Reading:

- Increase and broaden literacy activities for all students K-12 every day through regularly scheduled reading periods, book bags, home reading program and a variety of interesting and graded books
- Use data from the Benchmarks, Early Reading Profile, and comprehension assessments, to focus attention and strategies on readers 'not there yet' by:
 - a. Individual and/or small group intervention with Learning Assistance Resource Teacher or Educational Assistant
 - b. Small group reading using PM Benchmark and Fountas and Pinell leveled reading books
 - c. Orton-Gillingham reading support – provided by trained Speech and Language Pathologist
 - d. UFLI reading program
- Make reading visible in the school – Continue Reading Tree, regrow the leaves.

Numeracy

Continued implementation of Building Thinking Classrooms, a math instructional model that uses small group thinking tasks to engage students in sharing their math ideas.

Measures of Success

Reading Literacy assessments:

- IRA/DART
- Early Learning Profile for primary students not yet ready for PM benchmarks
- PM Benchmarks elementary readers until they master PM Benchmark 30
- Comprehension assessments based on IRA for students who need intensive intervention and who are past PM 30
- Grade 4, 7 FSA, Grade 10 & 12 Lit. Assessment
- Reading Tree - Number of leaves on the tree. This is a visual reminder and qualitative count of the reading that is happening at ZESS, but not an indicator of reading ability. As of May 2026 there are 85 leaves on the tree. Every September, the leaves are removed and we start again. A goal is to double the number of leaves by this time next year as a demonstration of making reading visible in the school.
- **Numeracy:**
 - Math Grade Assessment Tracking Sheet – to show grade level grown over the year.
 - Grade 4 FSA, Grade 10 Numeracy Assessment

*Small sample sizes require data from student assessments to be masked. Data is kept in the district E-insight system.

Resources Required

Math Grade Assessment Tracking Sheet (currently in development)
District Wide collaboration time to work on Building Thinking Classrooms
Discussion of Literacy techniques in School Based Teams

Relationship Goal

Goal Statement:

By June 2027, students will strengthen their ability to care for their social, emotional, and mental well-being by embedding social-emotional learning (SEL) into classroom practice.

Priority Alignment**Supporting Strategic Plan Goal:****Relationships**

Strong partnerships develop with parents, caregivers, and communities.

Why was this goal chosen?

Strong relationships between the school, families, Nations, and community help build trust, improve communication, support student belonging, and make learning more connected to the people and place ZESS serves. We have noticed that there is low parent attendance at PAC meetings, and awards assemblies. Student absenteeism is between 13% and 30% monthly.

Research shows that family engagement and strong family school relationships are associated with better student attendance and lower chronic absenteeism.

Strategies to implement

- Bi-weekly parent/caregiver updates from the school.
- Notice of awards to parents before school assemblies celebrating student learning (Celebrate Us Assemblies) will encourage parent attendance.
- Consultation with parents regarding what topics they would like to have included in community updates. Examples: What parents can do at home, attendance information, reading at home strategies, what different reading levels mean, course requirements for post secondary education.
- Participation of students and staff in community activities such as community cultural events, craft night, dinners, and community clean up.
- Evening school presentations so that parents that work can be present. Example: Christmas Concert, Cultural Song and Dance presentation.
- Some school events moved to community locations. Ex. BBQ hosted by school in Oclucje and Ehatis.
- Increased presence of school produced media demonstrating student learning and activities.

Measures of Success

By engaging community partners more voices we hope to increase parent attendance at:

PAC: 5 to 10 meeting per year – to held in school and community locations (increase number of parents/caregivers from 3 current regular attenders)

Parents coming to “Celebrate Us” assemblies (about five meetings per year). Currently, the number of parents/caregivers is typically 3-4 current regular attenders.

Number of parents at Meet the Parent Night or equivalent (2 per year). Target is to have 80% of families attend.

Completion of Surveys –Community consultation (district), (school based survey – ie Lunch survey)

Attendance rate for students. The current attendance for the year as May 20th is in Graph 1, See “What is Happening for Our Learners” section.

Pathways community survey – to be administered by IEC.

Responses from District Student Pathways survey questions:

1. Do you feel like you belong at school? (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Not sure, Agree, Strongly Agree)
2. What helps you feel like you belong at school? (open ended)
3. I feel connected to my community. (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Not sure, Agree, Strongly Agree)
4. I know how I can contribute to my community. (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Not sure, Agree, Strongly Agree)

Resources Required

Tracking of PAC meeting location and participation.

Attendance taken at Celebrate Us, Parent/Teacher nights – Photos posted.

Public facing chart showing involvement with community activities.

Work flow to increase visible publishing of activities on social media.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing Goal

Goal Statement:

Students will strengthen positive personal and cultural identity through regular participation in Nuu-chah-nulth language, art, song, drumming, dance, and land/community-connected learning. Students will be able to describe how these experiences connect to identity, belonging, and community.

Priority Alignment

Supporting Strategic Plan Goal:

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Fostering students' sense of identity.

Why was this goal chosen?

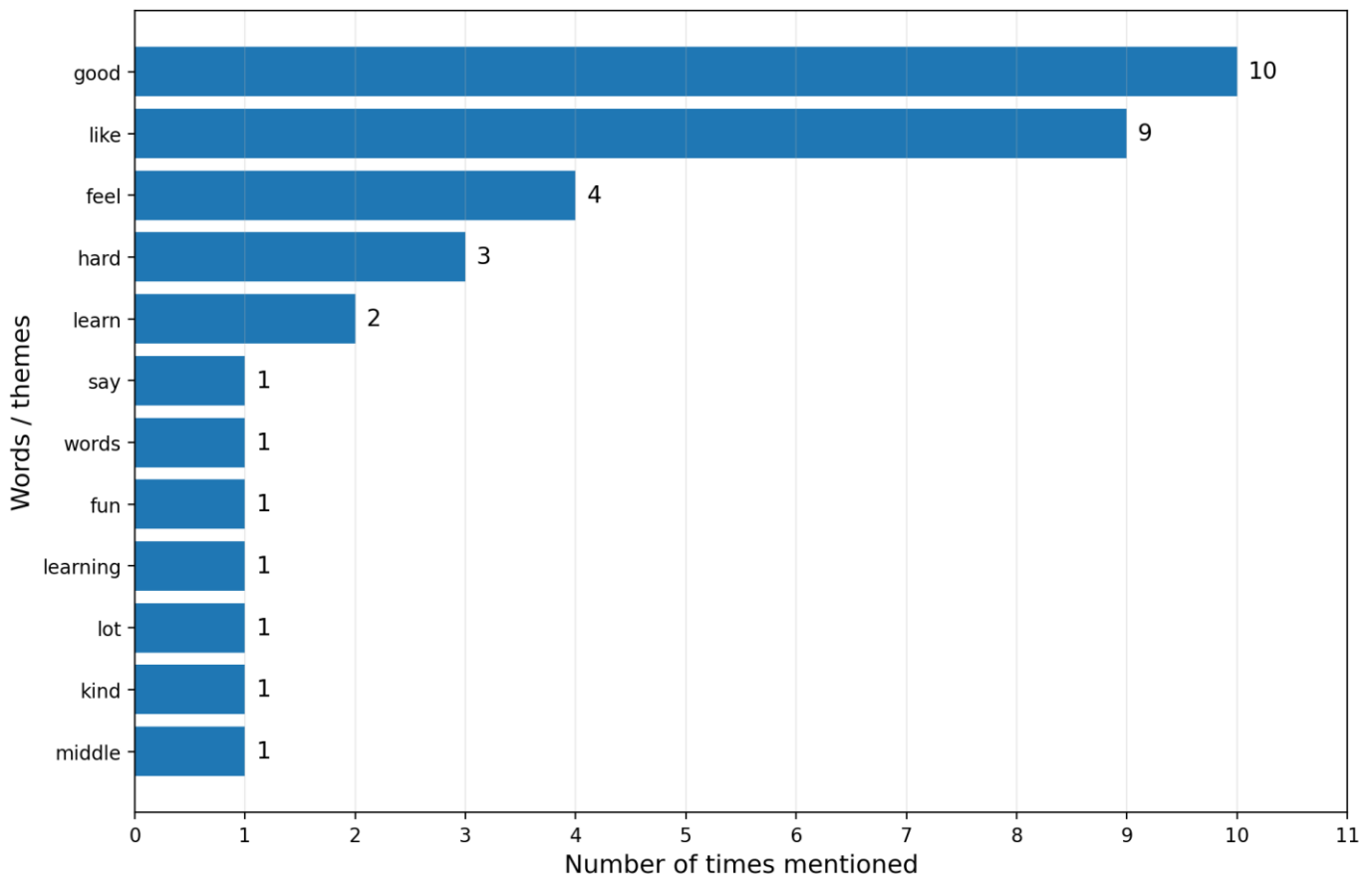
In alignment with the district strategic plan and the ZESS student population, fostering students' self-identity will improve their levels of success. Student self-identity is valuable to learning because students are more likely to engage, participate, and take ownership of their learning when they feel that who they are matters at school. When students see their family, culture, language, community, strengths, and experiences reflected in school life, they develop a stronger sense of belonging. Student who build a stronger sense of community are more likely to participate in community events and volunteer for the community. This supports confidence, participation, academic growth, and social-emotional development. For ZESS, supporting self-identity also connects directly to local relationships, Indigenous education, BC Core Competencies, especially Positive Personal and Cultural Identity and supports efforts of reconciliation. ZESS supports the Nations goal to build fluency in the Nuu-Chah-Nulth language.

Spring 2026 Pathways Survey

From the Spring 2026 Pathways survey, 88% of students report that they strongly agree or agree with the statement, "I feel connected to my culture."

When asked, "How do you feel about learning Nuu-chah-nulth language and culture?" Students typically respond with answers describing their enjoyment of Nuu-Chah-Nulth. These responses are positive but in the future, we would like to see how learning Nuu-Chah-Nulth at school makes them feel connected to their culture.

Student Response Frequency Map



Strategies to implement

- Weekly scheduled school-wide cultural practices that invite and involve community in practices. Knowledge Keepers will be invited to share their knowledge and teaching to students and staff.
- Daily culture classes
- Increased student Nuu-Chah-Nulth evidence of belonging / identity throughout school.
- Increased Nuu-Chah-Nulth language posted in school.
- Involvement of students and staff in community events outside of school. Examples that have happened in past years – totem pole raising, language dinners.
- Field Trips to visit areas and items of importance – ideas include Friendly Cove, BC Royal Museum and UBC museum of anthropology.
- Work with Nations to make a list of local knowledge keepers that could come into the school to share their skills with students.

Measures of Success

Tracking of student participation in cultural activities. High school: 17 of 19 students attended district Tli'itsu (Cultural Gathering – May 13, 2026 at GRSS). 10 of 16 elementary students attended with their family, too. This is a high number to improve on for next year!

Responses on Pathways Survey and Interview indicating how students view their self-identity and their relationship to the school. Is there a correlation between self-reported involvements in activities that foster cultural identity, and a sense of belonging at school? How does this correlate to daily attendance? The Pathway Survey will be completed by the end of May and results will be available for the current year.

Important measures of success:

- Number of weekly school-wide singing and dance practices. (currently almost every week)
- Continued class time devoted to Nuu-Chah-Nulth language. (Currently 30 to 60 minutes per day depending on student grade)
- Survey of expanded visual student presence in Nuu-Chah-Nulth in the school. Currently there is a large presence of Nuu-Chah-Nulth language and student work in the culture room and some in the hallways and classrooms. It would be a measure of success to have evidence of student-produced Nuu-Chah-Nulth self-identity in all learning spaces of the school. Number of visible Nuu-Chah-Nulth language labels present in classrooms (excluding culture room), hallways (excluding display cabinet), and other spaces (Library-excluding Deane Collection), Kitchen, Offices.)
- May 2026 count: Classrooms: 15, Hallways: 11 and one full push pin board, Other Spaces: 16

Resources Required

Nuu-Chah-Nulth teacher – There is an open position for the Nuu-chah-nulth teacher.

If the position remains open, extra support will be needed from Ehatis and Nuchatlaht Nations for regular signing and dancing practice as well as arts and crafting and on-the-land learning like food, cedar, and medicine harvesting.

Engagement

The creation of these goals, strategies, and measures of success was in consultation with:

1. Staff at staff meetings: April 8th, May 6th. During the meetings this plan was discussed in detail and the continued need for students to work on positive personal and cultural identity by participating in culture was highlighted. The school plan is an agenda item for the May 26th staff meeting.
2. Current NCN language teacher Celina Hanson – on going conversations, review of Indigenous Ways of Knowing Goal
3. Vince Smith – Elder In Residence – suggested cultural supports, arts, field trips to Museum of Anthropology, BC Royal Museum, Friendly Cove camping trip.
4. Parent Meeting May 20th, and June 3rd in Oclucje.

Next year, information about progress of school plan will be presented in:

1. Standing Item at Staff Meetings
2. Publicly (that meet privacy requirement of at least ten students in the sample) bi-weekly community updates Facebook/school updates, and community notices as well as PAC meetings to keep families informed about progress. Communication should include what the school is working on, what has changed, and what opportunities are coming up.
3. Ask for direct feedback during informal reporting evenings (parent/teacher meetings twice yearly)

Student reflection board in school. Student can reflect on whether they feel connected, supported, and represented at school.