

**TH Education Department  
(Public School K-12)  
March 2015**

**PART I:** Tr'ondëk Hwech'in recently signed an agreement based on the Self Governing Agreement (s. 17.7). The agreement is a formal commitment between Yukon and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in governments, to share responsibility for the delivery of education in the THTT. The schedule attached to the agreement identifies several priorities and are being developed. Some of these include:

- TH Culture Camps – Over past years, school-aged youth have been participating in TH Heritage Camps. Assigning course credit to these camps is a way of recognizing traditional teachings that take place outside the formal school structure. The curriculum has already been developed and approved for both Moose Camp, First Hunt, and First Fish. The curriculum development for Spring Youth Camp and a First Nations Leadership course are also underway. Subsequent phases of this initiative will include: integrating cultural components from the camp into curriculum for grades 7, 8, 9; exploring educational and curriculum development opportunities associated with Tr'ochëk; and ongoing teacher professional development.
- Education Outreach Program – In recent years, the need to re-establish an independent learning centre in Dawson for TH youth was identified as a priority. This program assists at-risk students along an educational path (ie. those who are not attending high school regularly or who show early signs of dropping out). It is a joint initiative between Yukon Department of Education, Robert Service School and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Education. In January 2013, a step towards developing an independent learning centre was made when RSS assigned a part-time teacher to teach disenfranchised youth at an off-site location. In June 2013, the Yukon Government confirmed a full-time teacher for the 2013-14 school year, as part the YG Rural Strategy Plan. The Education Outreach Program is staffed by a Robert Service School teacher who works for a few hours each week in space located at the TH Community Support Centre. The teacher spends the remainder of the time working with students in the school and coordinating alternative education plans for youth at-risk.

The mission of this program is to re-engage and empower young members of our community by means of the education process. The focus is on the whole student, each with individual needs and learning styles. The program focuses on creating a safe and respectful environment, while facilitating activities, courses, cultural experiences and conversations necessary to help students adopt the positive effects of life-long learning. Each student who attends this program has individualized plans created for their specific personal goals. Options are, but not limited to, assistance with high school graduation, adult graduation, GED, trades introduction, life skills, blended programming with RSS,

etc. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and Robert Service School are very excited to be offering this alternative for learning to students in the community. We want to work together to create a supportive and successful environment and model for our youth.

In 2013-14, two major program/workshops were coordinated for these students. One was a Small Engine Repair 'Sled Ed' course. It was a partnership between TH Education, RSS, TH HR Employment & Training, and Yukon College. Participants were engaged in the program over an 8 week period and fed a healthy meal daily. They also received credit for the program. Another program was jointly produced by TH Education and the Youth Centre. This was an 8-week Bike Repair Workshop held at the RSS shop, facilitated by YC staff, and funded by Yukon Literacy Coalition. TH Education funded a student work experience placement for one student and this was overseen by RSS Teacher for the Education Outreach program. An additional work experience placement was offered to a student this year in partnership with TH Fish & Wildlife dept, TH HR Job Creation program, TH Education, and RSS Education Outreach Teacher.

- Residential School Curriculum –The 'Finding Our Way Home' (K'änachä) scrapbook is accessible to Socials 10 students but it has been underutilized in past years. TH Elders identified the need for a teacher's guide to aid in the use of the scrapbook when teaching youth about residential schooling. In November 2012, a working group made up of TH/YG Government representatives and Elders (plus intergenerational survivors) began meeting to develop this curriculum. The project was completed in September 2014 and piloted in several Yukon schools including Robert Service School (for the second year in a row). Subsequent phases of this initiative include: professional development for teachers; K-12 curriculum development; educational resource development.

We appreciate the guidance of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in citizens and the support of the TH & YG Departments of Education and the Yukon First Nations Partnerships and Programs in moving this difficult subject forward in such a positive way. The focus is to engage students and teachers in a safe and respectful way, acknowledging the harms of the past and looking forward using teaching techniques that reflect and honour the cultural values of First Nation people.

A complementary project was the "Full Circle project" which was conducted over almost a two year period. This was largely a healing journey for intergenerational survivors of the IRS system but an important goal was to create short films that may be used as teaching resources in the classroom when delivering the residential school curriculum. The project is being completed in April 2015 and will be used in Yukon classrooms during the 2015-16 school year. The project was a partnership between TH Health & Social and TH Education, with funding from Yukon Education FN Partnerships and Programs Unit.

**PART II:** Tr'ondëk Hwech'in Education has also been instrumental in supporting some major Cultural Inclusion events and activities within a partnership with Robert Service School. These are coordinated by the TH Education Department's Community Education Liaison Coordinators (CELC's). TH's two CELCs (one for elementary & one for secondary) work closely with RSS staff and TH government department staff/citizens to coordinate important activities aimed at strengthening TH First Nations culture and traditions within the school, classrooms and curriculum. Some of these include:

- Outdoor Classroom: Łenähjin Tr'ödëk – The Gathering Place

“We need to teach our children today, so our way of life will live on.”

– TH Elder Percy Henry

The Robert Service School outdoor classroom project is an excellent example of the community coming together to bring a meaningful project to life. The school staff and students worked in collaboration with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Education staff and countless community members, culminating in the opening of the classroom in September 2012. The goal was to develop a plan that integrates common methods of classroom teaching with the traditional educational practices of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in people; practices that were based on the land and experience, and as shared by local Elders. Incorporating First Nations cultural elements into outdoor classroom design and curriculum is an important step in advancing students understand of, and instilling pride in, local First Nations culture and heritage.

Outdoor classrooms bring learning to life. An outdoor classroom is a space that brings learning outside. It becomes a gathering place for teachers and students and provides an opportunity to integrate nature into your school grounds. By giving students the opportunity to get outside and experience nature, they can bring learning to life. Outdoor classroom designs incorporate seating, teaching platforms and natural elements to explore. A well-planned outdoor classroom that is integrated into the school community will become an important part of your school and can be used for every subject, in every season (Citation: TD Focus on Forests, <http://www.focusonforests.ca/about/index.php/tdoutdoor>).

- 2013 Truth & Reconciliation Ceremony:

During the Spring of 2013, in partnership with Robert Service School and the Education Department, Tr'ondek Hwech'in hosted a ceremony at the school that unveiled the Government's Apology to Residential School Survivors and their families, in 2009. Each school in the country is to prominently display a copy of the Apology. RSS was the first in the territory to do so. At that same ceremony was the unveiling of the Hän flag in the gymnasium. It sits in equal position to the territorial and national flag in recognition of the role Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in government, citizens and Elders play in educating students at RSS. This was a very positive and, in the words of Elder Angie Joseph-Rear, “uplifting” event.

- Traditional Knowledge Field Trips:

TH Education works closely with RSS teachers and TH government departments/citizens to coordinate a variety of activities that take school-aged children/youth outside of the classroom to learn about traditional First Nations culture and values. These outings provide an opportunity to blend First Nations cultural teachings with the regular classroom curriculum to assist with meeting identified learning outcomes. It also creates an experiential learning opportunity that keeps children/youth engaged and appeals to different learning styles. Many of these activities rely on the involvement of TH Elders and other citizens who share First Nations traditional knowledge with various school classes. Field trips often involve visiting important sites within the TH Traditional Territory such as, Danoja Zho, Tr'ochek, Moosehide Village, Land of Plenty (insert Han name here), Tombstone Territorial Park, Cache Creek (insert Han name here).

Within the elementary grade levels, day trips and overnight camps to the TH traditional sites are becoming a routine part of classroom activities. Although the excursions are valuable in helping teachers meet the regular classroom learning outcomes that are required by the Department of Education, the camps/trips also serve as preparation for the high school camps offered in later years at the high school level in partnership with TH Heritage.

**PART II:** Tr'ondëk Hwech'in Education has also been instrumental in supporting the implementation of various projects and programs to support teaching, learning and student life. Some of these include:

- Brian Lewthwaite "Our Stories About Teaching & Learning"  
– Culturally Responsive Teaching Project:

This is a culturally responsive teaching project that has involved a Manitoba University-based researcher and his team, working in partnership with TH Education and Heritage departments, and RSS teachers, to write and implement science curriculum units for grades 4 and 5 at RSS. The project is ongoing; as upcoming plans are underway to write and implement curriculum units for grades 6 (in 2013) and grade 7 (in 2014).

- Educational Resources: Han language books were produced in 2012-13. These include: (1) Däwnach'e? How Many? Numbers in the Hän Language; (2) Nänjit dähönch'e? How are you? Feelings in the Hän Language; and (3) Dënakar: Colours in the Hän Language. Copies have been placed in RSS classes (Kindergarten to Gr. 4 + Hän Room), the library, Tr'inkë Zho & Headstart, TH Education & Heritage offices. The Department of Education has also obtained copies to distribute in Yukon public schools. The project was funded by TH Education, Yukon Government's Cultural Inclusion fund, and with a contribution from the Department of Education to complete the project. Support was received from TH Heritage and the Hän Language Working Group in creating the books. An audio (CD) recording of Elder Angie Josph-Rear reading in the Hän and English languages, is inserted into the back of each book.

The Story of the Moosehide Slide book was also produced in 2012-13. It was inspired by an artwork created by Graham Everitt for the Yukon School of Visual Arts (SOVA) program and Mary McLeod's version of the Moosehide Slide story. The artwork illustrates the story as re-told by Angie Joseph-Rear. These books have also been placed in RSS classes (Kindergarten to Gr. 5 + Hän Room), the library, Tr'inkë Zho & Headstart, TH Education & Heritage offices and the Department of Education has obtained copies to distribute in Yukon public schools. The books were funded by TH Education, Yukon Government's Cultural Inclusion fund, and with a \$2,400 contribution from the Yukon Arts Centre's Culture Quest Fund. TH Heritage staff were a valuable support for the project. An audio (CD) recording of Elder Angie Joseph-Rear reading the story, is inserted into the back of each book.

The Big Dipper story was published in 2015 for use in the elementary school grades. In 2014, the project was developed by the RSS Grade 3 teacher and artwork created by the students serves as the illustration for the story. Valuable assistance was provided by the Hän language teacher, TH Heritage and TH Education staff. The development of more educational resources remains ongoing.

In 2014-15, a theme box was created to support classroom teachers in using the "Born Under A Spruce Tree" book written by respected TH Elder JJ VanBibber. The theme box contains classroom learning outcomes, sample teaching activities, special maps, related books/readings, etc. This project with support teachers in working with TH citizens and Elders to bring traditional knowledge into the classroom. This serves as the first of many theme box resource units that TH Education will be developing with RSS and TH Heritage.

- Jigging Club – An afterschool club created in 2012/13 for grades 1-6, coordinated by TH Education, led by TH citizens and Elder Victor Henry. The Club meets weekly to learn and practice traditional dances, which they perform for the community (ie: Moosehide Gatherings, feasts, special events). In 2013, a project was carried out to create regalia for the club. Funding for the project was received from YG Youth Investment Fund and the Dawson Recreation Board. The skirts and vests were sewn by Freda Roberts. Dolores Scheffen led a community workshop for volunteers, youth and their parents to make moccasins. The regalia will remain with the Jigging Club coordinators and will be worn at community performances and competitions.
- Youth Mentorship – In 2013, afterschool mentorship was coordinated for some youth. It consisted of one-on-one mentoring and a peer-mentored afterschool activity. Due to its success, TH Education (in partnership with RSS and RSS Council) put forward a funding request to YG Education as part of the Attendance Initiative Fund with a proposal to develop and implement a more organized mentorship program. The funds support hiring a Mentorship Coordinator, to create a mentorship program similar to Big Brothers Big Sisters model to arrange in and outside of school mentorship which will support students/families and encourage greater levels of attachment to school. The goal is to

create a sustainable and rewarding school-based program, which fosters positive relationships built on friendship, trust and empowerment.

During the 2013-14 school year, TH Education worked with BBBS Yukon (Whitehorse) to secure a funding partnership for the TH/RSS Mentorship program. As a result, TH Education, RSS, and RSS Council signed an MOU with BBBS Yukon which provides core funding, training opportunities and program support for a satellite office in Dawson (one other already exists in Watson Lake). Although some additional fund raising is required, the Mentorship program will be able to continue year-round.

- Summer Youth Camp –The youth summer camp program was designed in 2013 to meet the needs of pre-teen youth between the ages of 8 and 13 years. The focus of the programming was to assist youth in increasing positive self-esteem, building leadership skills, and developing a sense of belonging within their community. The programming that took place involved community outreach, connecting youth with elders, land based teachings, and learning various life skills. The program was also viewed as an effective way of bridging the gap between school years since, oftentimes, youth who do not have meaningful and engaging activities to participate in throughout the summertime, can fall behind in the academic year. The camp offered various opportunities and activities to meet the social, emotional, and physical needs of the 12 registered participants. The program was supported by Health Investment Fund (staffing for a Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator positions), TH Employment and Training (staffing for a Junior Camp Assistant position), TH Education, and many community partnerships.

The ongoing delivery of this program is enabled through special funding allocations from TH. Additional assistance for the camp comes from TH HR Job Creation program, Service Canada Summer Jobs program, Recreation Parks Association Yukon (RHEAL) grant, the City of Dawson Recreation Board (2014), and Crime Prevention Victim Services (2015).

**For more information contact Ashley Doiron, Education Manager at 993-7161**