BACKGROUNDER

2019 Premier’s Awards for Excellence in Education finalist biographies

Community Engagement Award

Alan Gee, teacher, Clarence Fulton Secondary school, SD 22 (Vernon)
In his 32 years as a teacher, Gee has worked hard to support his students to cultivate both classroom and community connections. Passionate about experiential learning, he has created educational opportunities for his students at both local and global levels. He regularly invites community members into his classroom to share their unique perspectives – a Holocaust survivor, a refugee and a hypnotherapist included. He has created a global education course highlighting civic and global issues and a Japanese language program, as well as organized a canoe project in partnership with the local First Nation. In all his work, Gee challenges his students to be independent thinkers.

Casey Litton, teacher, Nechako Valley Secondary school, SD 91 (Nechako Lakes)
Early in his 25-year teaching career, Litton, then teaching at Eugene Joseph Elementary, a First Nations school, was instrumental in helping the school secure funding for its first full computer lab and satellite internet connection. In his current role, he has helped forge important connections between his school’s science department, University of Northern British Columbia ECHO project staff and local community environmental, ecology and Indigenous groups, providing hands-on educational opportunities for students. His leadership has inspired his peers to take a similar approach to teaching, empowering them to also think outside the box. By focusing on student-centred learning, he has contributed positively to the success of many current and former students.

Sheila Monroe, teacher, Okanagan Landing Elementary School, SD 22 (Vernon)
Teaching for more than 30 years, Monroe works hard to bring students, parents, teachers and community members together to be environmental leaders. She has led a number of projects at her school, including the developing a 465 square-metre (5,000-square-foot) butterfly- and pollinator-friendly community garden, has worked to naturalize the grounds behind her school, and has connected students with local organizations to remove invasive species from area parks. An engaging grades 4 and 5 classroom teacher, her love for both her students and community is evident as she helps her students understand good citizenship by integrating school and civic involvement into classroom learning.
Extracurricular Leadership Award

Sahba Ghani, teacher, Burnaby South Secondary school, SD 41 (Burnaby)
A teacher for 22 years, Ghani has a natural ability to engage with her students in a meaningful and supportive way. The social studies teacher is dedicated to her role as sponsor of her school’s WE Council and provides a safe, inclusive and encouraging environment for members. She gives students the confidence to build community beyond the classroom setting, and supports them to play an active role in the world at large. Through her work with the WE Council, she has created more than just an after-school club. She has developed a collective of conscientious student activists and community leaders who are committed to supporting local, national and international causes, are committed to social justice and who have been empowered to create lasting change.

Paul Lilly, teacher, École Chief Dan George Middle school, SD 34 (Abbotsford)
An inspiring home economics and drama teacher, Lilly has led the presentation of nine school musicals, a source of excitement and pride for many students at his school. He believes strongly in the benefit of hands-on, real-life learning experiences and so has led a variety of other activities as well, including a leadership program, the Grade 8 year-end celebration and a drag racing program, which supports a number of students who otherwise struggle in school. Through all of his efforts, he works to ensure students have fun but also learn about teamwork, the value of hard work and walk away with a sense of accomplishment and pride, and are supported to build positive relationships with their peers.

Scott Stefanek, teacher, École Brantford Elementary school, SD 41 (Burnaby)
Since arriving at his school, Stefanek, a caring and engaged teacher, coach and mentor, has served as the head coach for every sporting activity at the school – cross country, volleyball, basketball, track and ultimate frisbee included. For cross country and track, he not only coaches, but also helps run the district event as a convener. He helped organize a biking program and launched a run club for students and staff that participates in the Vancouver Sun Run, in addition to several other clubs, from anime to coding. He goes above and beyond to support students to participate and do their best, is always their biggest cheerleader and encourages them to achieve their goals both in the classroom, during their club time and on the playing field.

Indigenous Education Award

Maria Bruneau, teacher, École Dr. Charles Best Secondary school, SD 43 (Coquitlam)
A 26-year teacher, Bruneau is known for her dedication to integrating Indigenous teachings into her classroom and school community. She teaches social studies through an Indigenous lens to offer all students deeper understanding and awareness. She also supports local Indigenous students, both in the classroom and out; for example, last year she took a group to participate in the National Aboriginal Veterans Day ceremony in Vancouver. After being approached by a student, she implemented the district’s first schoolwide Orange Shirt Day assembly in partnership with local groups and empowered Indigenous students to play leading roles.
She is dedicated to the Truth and Reconciliation process and truly recognizes and respects the role the education system plays in that process.

**Ivy (Qeqeltsin) Chelsea, Indigenous language and culture teacher, Chase Secondary school/Haldane Elementary school, SD 73 (Kamloops/Thompson)**

Believing that language creates identity, Chelsea works hard to bring language to life. A Secwepemc language and culture teacher at two schools, she also provides leadership in the district, promoting the local language and culture. On her own time, she offers workshops for staff to learn basic Secwepemctsin and provides support staff and teachers with strategies on how they can integrate it into their classrooms. She also recently partnered with BC Parks on a pilot project to develop a “story trail,” a way of experiencing Tsútswecw Provincial Park through an Indigenous lens. She is an exemplary role model for Indigenous students as well as Indigenous educators.

**Jordan Smith, teacher/program co-ordinator, Twin Rivers Education Centre, SD 73 (Kamloops/Thompson)**

A teacher and program co-ordinator at the Aboriginal school of choice, Four Directions Secondary school, Smith works hard to connect students with Aboriginal culture and history, and to create an environment of safety and belonging. Each year, she identifies a thematic focus that connects experiential learning, art, community involvement and field trips to an elective course that all students are enrolled in. In keeping with the theme, students engage in a variety of hands-on learning opportunities such as traditional fishing, gathering with local Elders and working with Indigenous artists. This year, she secured a Vancouver Foundation grant to pilot a program designed to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing alongside western curriculum by involving family, Elders and knowledge keepers.

**Outstanding New Teacher Award**

**Grace Broadfoot, teacher, J.V. Humphries Elementary and Secondary school, SD 8 (Kootenay Lake)**

Described as a “game changer” at her school, Broadfoot shows a real concern for her students and their learning. A highly respected teacher, she is attentive to students’ socio-emotional as well as physical health, incorporating mental health curriculum into her classes. She remains committed to developing educated citizens, using innovative methods to develop exciting and engaging learning experiences and uses the outdoor environment as her classroom. She is a model teacher for B.C.’s new curriculum and its emphasis on core competencies as she keeps big, connecting ideas at the forefront of lesson plans, while also delving deeply into the curricular competencies and content important in each discipline. She is also dedicated to personal professional learning and development.

**Robert French, teacher, South Central Interior Distance Education school, SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen)**

French is a distance learning teacher who has successfully stretched himself into a variety of projects, environments and activities that have truly been making a difference to students. He uses a variety of technologies to ensure all learners in his courses can be successful.
He works to motivate students and adjusts learning as needed by the individual. He also facilitates partnerships between his distance learning school and outside communities interested in supporting adult learners. While teaching math at his school, he developed an online computer programming course as well as a district-wide program for elementary coding and robotics. He is also helping grow the district’s career programs.

**Prabhjot Grewal, teacher, North Delta Secondary school, SD 37 (Delta)**

Innovative and a natural leader, Grewal has an amazing ability to connect with her students and inspire them. A member of the school’s science department, as well as a Punjabi teacher, she works to act as a catalyst within the minds of her students to inspire genuine curiosity and has embraced the competencies of the new curriculum. She is a member of her school’s professional development committee, and her contributions and ideas have led to some interesting and refreshing training opportunities for staff. She has also introduced regular “lunch and learns” for interested parties to share teaching strategies, technology and assessment methods they are using in their classrooms.

**Social Equity and Diversity Award**

**Bryan Gidinski, teacher, Chaffey-Burke Elementary school, SD 41 (Burnaby)**

Teaching for 23 years, Gidinski believes strongly that all students should feel included in the classroom. Valuing diversity and equity, he works hard to create positive learning opportunities and welcoming spaces for all students. He encourages and empowers his students to take action to positively influence their community. He has been instrumental in fostering an appreciation for diversity and supporting people of all sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions in his school community. He is actively involved in his school’s professional development committee and engages his peers in activities that help them recognize and celebrate their differences, and connect those understandings to their professional practice.

**Chad Jobe, co-ordinator/teacher, Vast Centre/Learning Alternatives, SD 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith)**

Jobe believes in creating inclusive and experiential learning opportunities so all students can be successful in the classroom and beyond. He team teaches more than 50 students from grades 8 to 12 in the ABOUT Program, which incorporates unique learning opportunities using Indigenous cultural education as the foundation to core academics. He helps students create a weekly podcast on topics like racism and poverty, giving them an opportunity to demonstrate personal responsibility, tolerance and respect for the ideas and beliefs of others. His passion not only inspires his students, but also school staff, families and community members. He believes that all students are capable of learning at high levels and inspires others to believe the same.

**Antony Wilson, Upper School head of global engagement and service learning, Mulgrave School (International School of Vancouver), West Vancouver**

Wilson, who has been teaching for 20 years, is committed to social justice and believes strongly in the potential of students to positively impact their world. He works hard to create changemakers, teaching them to understand their place in society, so they can truly make a
positive difference. He created the Global Experiential Learning Programme, which includes international and local service expeditions and a service learning week, as well as worked with students to facilitate a number of other annual events and initiatives that focus on a variety of social justice issues. He encourages student engagement and promotes the value of experiential learning to foster sustainability, diversity, collaboration, innovation and social change.

**Technology and Innovation Award**

**Brendan Robertson, teacher, École Beairsto Elementary school, SD 22 (Vernon)**

A tinkerer at heart, Robertson is a natural fit in his district leadership role as technology innovation co-ordinator as well as a Grade 4 teacher. He is committed to integrating emerging digital technology tools into the classroom to enhance learning and engagement for all students. For example, he has taken students on virtual field trips to a refugee camp in Jordan and to the Museum of Modern Art using virtual reality, has students use augmented reality, has incorporated drones into physics and math classes, and has regularly used coding and robotics. His use of technology in the French immersion setting has given primarily English-speaking parents a unique perspective into the French-language learning that their children do daily. He was also pivotal in early pilot work experimenting with multiple platforms of electronic assessment.

**Tammy Tomm, grades 6 and 7 teacher, Columbia Park Elementary school, SD 19 (Revelstoke)**

Tomm uses technology as a tool to enhance student understanding and deepen engagement through interactive learning environments. She has introduced students to a wide range of technologies, including the Scratch and Scratch Jr. coding languages, Makey Makey, and mobile technology and associated tools, such as Green Screen and stop motion video production. She has been an active participant in two Special Education Technology British Columbia Synergy projects, bringing new technology into the school. These interdisciplinary projects helped to deepen students’ communication, critical and creative thinking skills, while providing engaging learning activities. She also introduced Exploration Fridays, seeing multi-age groups of students meet in different classrooms to explore, create and innovate, while learning about subjects they and their teachers might not normally be exposed to.

**Denise Underwood, teacher, McGowan Park Elementary school, SD 73 (Kamloops/Thompson)**

Underwood works hard to engage students through powerful hands-on learning opportunities. She connects her students with different types of technology and helps them develop skills working with a number of different applications – ChatterPix, Green Screen and Book Creator, to name a few. She also introduces students to non-digital hands-on technologies. For example, this year, she led a farm-to-school project at her school, seeing students build and maintain a chicken coop. A life-long learner, she stays informed about new and exciting ways to deepen student engagement and is often called upon to support other teachers in their own learning about technology integration. In addition, she uses new technology to effectively communicate with parents, ensuring they are engaged with what their children are learning on a daily basis.
School Leadership Award

Carol DeFehr, principal, Juniper Ridge Elementary school, SD 73 (Kamloops/Thompson)
An innovative leader in her school community, DeFehr has a passion for education and is committed to honouring each and every child. She implemented a slogan, #alwaystry, speaking to her supportive vision for student success and communicating to students, parents and staff her belief that learning can be challenging, mistakes are part of the process and perseverance is critical to making positive gains. To encourage students to push themselves toward academic success, she instituted a principal’s pass and principal learning alert card system to regularly honour students’ efforts to achieve their personal best and celebrate their education. She also works to cultivate students’ positive social development and goes to great lengths to communicate with parents so they can play an active role in their child’s success.

Brett Hancock, district principal, learning alternatives, SD 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith)
A passionate, innovative and courageous leader, Hancock is dedicated to supporting the needs of his district’s most vulnerable students so they can reach their full potential and be successful. He works hard to give students a sense of belonging and to create a safe learning environment, and strives to discover and implement new ideas to provide them with increased opportunities to learn and grow. He is a strong proponent of Indigenous language revitalization and has committed to learning the local Coast Salish language himself. He has led the district’s principals in professional development on the culture and history of Indigenous peoples and is unrelenting in his pursuit to bring Indigenous ways of knowing and learning to his staff and students.

Troy White, principal, École Kelowna Secondary school, SD 23 (Central Okanagan)
White, an innovative and respectful leader, is tireless in his pursuits to enhance the learning and success of all staff and students at his school. He continuously updates his leadership style to meet the ever-changing needs of his school’s 21st-century learners. He has contributed to the creation of a positive school culture and rich learning environment where educators are supported and all students can succeed and feel welcome. He is a team player who leads with passion, integrity, active listening and moral stewardship, doing everything he can to support the betterment of the school community. A strong supporter of all subjects and extracurricular activities, he takes an active role in helping students achieve their best both in the classroom and out.

District Leadership Award

Lisa McCullough, superintendent, SD 48 (Sea to Sky)
An energetic and empathetic leader, McCullough successfully led her school district through a carefully planned, collaborative and strategic initiative to change the culture of learning and improve student achievement. The culmination was an education plan that resulted in the significant increase of Indigenous and special education graduation rates, overall graduation rates, and grade-to-grade transition rates, as well as a decrease in suspension rates.
She is passionately committed to diversity, inclusion and personalization as key elements in all learning environments and through this vision, empowers district leaders and educators to further enhance the life chances of their most vulnerable learners and all learners.

**Jordan Kleckner, district principal, learning technology, SD 23 (Central Okanagan)**
A thoughtful, courageous and passionate leader, Kleckner works tirelessly to empower teams of educators to improve the life outcomes of the students, staff and parents they serve. He works hard to create learning environments that nurture innovation and equity across the system. Examples of strategic projects he has led or co-led include InnovateEd 2019, a regional conference supporting a pedagogy-first approach to the integration of technology, and TEDxYouth@Doyle Avenue, a local TEDx event promoting student voice and leadership. He models the importance of being a life-long learner and has created a variety of learning resources to support digital literacy skills for both students and staff.

**Colleen Minnabarriet, principal, Desert Sands Community school, SD 74 (Gold Trail)**
Minnabarriet is a visionary and inspirational leader, fuelled by an interest in collaboration, inclusion and the best interests of each student. She has been a powerful education leader in a time of Truth and Reconciliation and it has long been her belief that only through understanding and acceptance of history can we begin to offer meaningful gestures of reconciliation. To fight the increasing disengagement of secondary students, she supported her school team to launch a new education model that is successfully engaging students in their learning through collaboration and interdisciplinary inquiry, and providing them with agency, voice, choice and ownership. She also believes in the importance of supporting teachers to implement research-based practices to improve student success.

**Outstanding Support — School Community**

**Jodi Guy, Indigenous youth care worker, École Phoenix Middle school, SD 72 (Campbell River)**
For the past 15 years, Guy has supported Indigenous students and their families so they have access to a holistic education that not only represents their culture, but also celebrates it. In addition to using Indigenous ways of learning as a fabric for all student learning, she works diligently to ensure her school is safe, welcoming and reflects the diverse Indigenous student population. She creates a space that encourages members of the community to be partners in the children’s education. Her workday extends well beyond school hours as she takes on a variety of tasks to support students and her local community.

**Dorothy Jones, Indigenous education worker, A.L. Fortune Secondary school, SD 83 (North Okanagan-Shuswap)**
A passionate, caring and energetic Indigenous education worker, Jones has devoted years of service dedicated to the mental, spiritual and emotional needs of students at her school. Wanting the best for them, she works hard to be inclusive, to ensure their voices are heard and their well-being is put first. Her approach to Indigenous education encourages students to become active participants in traditional teachings, and she creates an exciting, engaging environment for students. Her service highlights include working one-on-one with students academically; teaching Secwepemc language, culture and history; leading afterschool programs,
drumming and beading programs, and annual events; as well as fostering relationships between students and families, and the local Indigenous community.

**Wendel Williams, safe school specialist, École Alpha Secondary school, SD 41 (Burnaby)**

Having served in this position for 25 years, Williams plays a critical supporting role in the safety and well-being of students. He is skilled in the art of conflict resolution, mediation, crisis intervention, threat-risk assessment, and de-escalation of potentially violent situations. His proactive efforts have prevented the occurrence of countless potentially harmful incidents. He works hard to build relationships with students based on trust and respect, and provides a much-needed lifeline for many kids, connecting them with local community agencies and partners as required. His efforts have resulted in students feeling safe and connected at school, and when concerning situations do arise, they feel comfortable seeking him out for advice and support.

**Outstanding Support — Teaching Assistant**

**Elaine Bayles, educational assistant, Glanford Middle school, SD 61 (Greater Victoria)**

A gifted educational assistant, “Miss Elaine” as she is known to her students, works hard to build lasting and meaningful relationships with all students. She is passionate about connecting with her school’s most vulnerable learners, making her a strong advocate for inclusivity and connectedness. Working with at-risk youth, she helps them explore their identity, recognize the consequences of their actions, and supports them to find a new positive path through life. She sees each child as an individual, is responsive to their needs, and celebrates their achievements – big and small. She also empowers, mentors and collaborates with colleagues, sharing her interest in ensuring that every child feels good about themselves, that they can learn and grow, and acknowledges that they are an important member of their school community.

**Sandra Breslin, educational assistant, Prince Charles Elementary school, SD 34 (Abbotsford)**

A dedicated, passionate and enthusiastic educational assistant, Breslin wants every child to be the best they can be and to feel safe, loved and cared for at school. She works hard to find strengths in all students, beginning where they are at, and celebrates the differences that make every one of them special and unique. She is a natural leader in the area of supporting students with a range of learning and physical disabilities, mental illnesses and complex disabilities. She is committed to making her school a more inclusive and supportive place for all and has led her school on a transformative journey toward inclusion and growth in the areas of social and emotional learning.

**Marie Kielpinski, educational assistant, Mount Boucherie Secondary school, SD 23 (Central Okanagan)**

Kielpinski works hard to build a strong school culture by reaching out, embracing positives, ensuring that everyone feels part of the whole, and creating a safe, respectful environment for all students and staff. She creates motivating and engaging learning environments, while uplifting and encouraging students who otherwise cannot function in a regular classroom setting.
She supports students not only academically, but also socially and emotionally as they deal with the struggles of their home, social and personal life. Students reach out to her regularly when they need to talk or are in crisis. She often liaises between students, parents and community supports, while going to exhaustive efforts to ensure their well-being, as well as academic success leading to graduation.

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