

Chinook's Edge hosts its first-ever Indigenous Youth Conference

For Immediate Release, September 16, 2016: Upwards of 250 students of First Nations, Métis and Inuit heritage from across the division will gather in Olds on October 5th for a day of learning, networking and celebrating their culture.

The event has attracted presenters and entertainers who are pillars of Indigenous strength in Canada, including Justice Murray Sinclair (Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and George Leach (JUNO Award winning musician). Conference organizers have been pleased with the response from people who want to be involved in the day, and their biggest challenge has been trying to keep it just for students in Chinook's Edge.

"I've had calls from other school divisions, because this size of event exclusively for Indigenous students is uncommon," said Tracy Laut, Family Wellness Worker at École Deer Meadow School in Olds, who has been instrumental in the planning. "Our staff involve Indigenous students in activities and initiatives at their schools, but we have never brought a large group together under one roof to share resources and ideas. It will be a great day and we're certainly prepared to share our experiences and information with other divisions, so they can celebrate Indigenous youth in this way!

"Our whole committee is so excited to be organizing this and we've had tremendous support from all levels in Chinook's Edge. Everyone recognizes this is important and valuable. We involved Indigenous students in our planning meetings, and they had really good ideas for the day. We hope everyone will leave with enthusiasm, connections and ideas of what they want to do back at their schools. Our thought is that once you invite them, celebrate them and encourage them to be proud of who they are, that will make its way into their hearts and back into their schools to impact others."

The conference is being organized by a steering committee that was formed two years ago to bring Indigenous Education and Teaching into Chinook's Edge classrooms through a number of projects, including the creation of multi-graded curriculum kits to support The Seven Sacred Teachings. As they discussed the potential of hosting a division-wide conference and began planning details of the event, they involved various students along the way.

"They asked me what I wanted and what I thought other people would like, and I'm excited that some of those things became part of the conference," said Matthew Julian, a Grade 8 student at École Innisfail Middle School. "I get to meet more people and learn more about my culture, and they spent a lot of time making sure it will be interesting for students. We talk a lot at home about being First Nations, but I definitely want to keep learning more about my culture at school. I'm really looking forward to the conference."

The Indigenous Youth Conference is for Chinook's Edge students in Grades 5-12. It takes place at the Olds College Student Alumni Centre on October 5. For information on Indigenous Education and activities in Chinook's Edge, visit www.cesd73.ca, under Quicklinks.

"Our Central Office Leadership Team is having conversations in every one of our schools about how we are supporting our Indigenous students," said Dr. Lissa Steele, Associate Superintendent of Learning Services. "We want all of our students to feel supported, involved and proud of who they are. This conference is powerful for these kids and the committee has worked hard to make it meaningful to them. We know that the more safe and comfortable you feel at school, the better you learn. Chinook's Edge is proud to honour our Indigenous students in this way."

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