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School Sustainability Assessment of Skeena Middle School

Transportation	
Checklist	Current Evaluation of Skeena Middle School
☒ Does your school have secured and easily accessible bike and skateboard storage?	There are bike racks at the front of the school and secure storage for skateboards/longboards outside the principals' offices.
☒ Are there safe routes for students and staff to take on bike or foot to get to school?	Many of the streets connecting to the school have safe sidewalks and crosswalks. There are also some trails connecting an elevated area of town to the area where the school is so people don't have to walk along the road with heavy traffic of people going up and down the hill.
☒ Does your school highlight the health benefits of active transportation, like walking or biking?	As a school, this isn't addressed. However, it was something our class discussed and many other teachers that teach PE would likely discuss. There are walking trails near the school so it's a common activity for PE classes at Skeena Middle School.
☐ Has your school campaigned for a bike to school week and taught lessons about pedestrian and road safety?	Go By Bike BC promotes three different weeks throughout the year for as "Go By Bike" weeks and encourage people to go by bike instead of vehicle to reduce green house gas emissions. I've worked at Skeena for a year and none of the weeks were promoted within the school. The week in February wouldn't work to participate in for our area, but the weeks in June and September typically have great weather for riding bikes in our area.
☐ Does your school have an idle-free zone where students are dropped-off and picked-up?	With many parents waiting to pick up students at the end of the school day, many vehicles are idling in the parking lot and along side streets close to the school. On mild days, people are more inclined to turn off their engines, but on hot or cold days, people keep their engines running for either cooling or heating.
☐ Do students know how to take public transportation safely and how to navigate the system?	Based on my class this previous year, I don't think many students know how to take public transportation. We rode the public bus on a field trip and it was the first time for many of the students. The schedule for our town is consistent but with large waits between buses. However, it services many areas of town and can at least minimize the amount of walking or biking to school if the route someone takes doesn't go all the way to the school.

☒ Do all students that are eligible to take the school bus have the appropriate pass and take it regularly?	Students that live outside the city limits of Terrace are eligible to ride school buses for free. Students must complete a registration form and have their physical bus pass with them to ride the bus. I don't know if many students are unaware of their eligibility school wide or if they don't utilize it. I would like to assume that everyone that can ride the bus is aware. However, there were a few students in my class this past school year that had a habit of sleeping in too late and missing the bus and then having a parent drive them to school. Others occasionally lost their pass and had to have a parent drive them. Additionally, the school buses are gas powered.

School Grounds	
Checklist	Current Evaluation of Skeena Middle School
☒ Do your school grounds have green space and native species growing?	There is lots of grass on the school grounds that has natural clovers growing in it. When the flowers in the grass, there are lots of bees collecting the nectar. There are also some pine trees and cedar trees.
☐ Do your school grounds have trees that provide shade and cooler temperatures to spaces used by students and staff, as well as close to the building to help shade it?	There are some sections of the school grounds that have clumps of trees that provide shade but it's a very large property and the area closest to the school where classes usually spend time has very limited shade and lots of space for trees to grow.
☒ Does you school have a garden for learning about and growing fruits, vegetables, and herbs that can be used by students or the school's food program?	There is a small garden area with raised garden beds and some young fruit trees. However, the planting, management, and communication about the garden is unorganized.
☒ Are your school grounds maintained with pesticide free alternatives and natural fertilizers, such as finished compost?	Pesticides and commercial fertilizers are not used on school grounds by the school district maintenance department. They don't typically fertilize at all.

Assessment Summary:

Overall, Skeena Middle School has taken initial steps towards sustainability in terms of transportation and the school grounds. Its strengths include the accessibility for sustainable transportation, with the storage availability for bikes and skateboards, and the sidewalks and safe routes for pedestrians to travel to and from the school. Additionally, the setup of the school garden, the planting of fruit trees and the pesticide-free grounds demonstrates a clear desire to have sustainable school grounds. The potential available made possible by the building the of garden is very strong.

Next, Skeena needs to work to close the gaps between infrastructure and action. For transportation, gaps include focusing on the health benefits of active transportation, campaigning for more students and staff to bike or walk to school, teaching students to use public transit, designating the parking lot as an idle free zone and encouraging drivers not to idle when waiting for students. By ensuring people know the different ways they can get to school more sustainably and having more reasons to, more people will be likely to use alternative modes of transportation that don't involve single-family, gas-powered vehicles every day. For the school grounds, gaps include trees for shade closer to the building and organization of the school garden. By improving the organization of the garden, the space can be maximized and food produced can be used in the food program.

Recommendations:

Transportation:

1. Designate the parking lot as an idle-free zone.
   By putting idle-free zone signs in the parking lot and encourage parents to turn off their engines when they wait, less carbon emissions will be released when students are being dropped off and picked up. According to the *Sustainable Schools Best Practices Guide,* "idling a vehicle longer than 10 seconds uses more fuel and produces more emissions compared to restarting the engine" (BC Ministry of Education, p. 28). With this in mind, a very large about of carbon emissions can be reduced simply by turning off engines while waiting. To spread the word, the school could "put up posters outside the school, leaflet at pick-up and drop-off with the help of nominated eco-champions and ask students to take leaflets home" (Friends of the Earth, p. 4). The long-term benefits of an idle free zone could be immense.
2. Encourage teachers to take the city bus on field trip.
   Not only is the bus already going along it's route, but it's also free for kids 12 and under in Terrace. The means before January, all grade 7 students can ride the bus for free. Once students turn 13, it's only $1.75 to ride it and it's $2 for adults. There's a bus stop in front of the school grounds and another route stops along the side. Between these two routes, that are many different places the bus can be taken for a field trip with a "greener school trip" (Friends of the Earth, p. 5). Additionally, taking public transit as a class will give students the knowledge and confidence for them to do it on their own. If used to their maximum potential, "one city bus can take 40 vehicles off the road and save 70,000 L of fuel" (BC Ministry of Education, p. 27).
3. Organize a campaign for a GoByBike Week.
   Encouraging students and staff to ride their bikes or walk to school to reduce the collective carbon emissions has the potential to be very impactful. As an example, seen in the *Sustainable Schools Best Practices Guide,* a school set a goal to "90% of students walking to school on Wednesdays" and the result was "increased participation from 65% to almost 90% over a five-month period" (BC Ministry of Education, p. 4). Since "transportation contributes a full 45% of total household greenhouse gas emissions in BC" (BC Ministry of Education, p. 27), a successful GoByBike week, or similar campaign, can make a big impact on climate change. As stated on their website, the 2025 GoByBike weeks participation had an impact similar to "removing the annual emissions of about 600 typical passenger cars from the road for one year" ("GoByBike BC – Bike It. You'll Love It.").

School Grounds:

1. Plant more trees.
   There are many long-term benefits to planting more trees. By planting more trees closer to the building, when the trees get large enough, they will provide pockets of cooler areas for staff and students to spent time outside. This is especially important as our climate warms. As stated in the *Sustainable Schools Best Practices Guide,* "natural plantings of trees and shrubs can diminish air and noise pollution and assist in cooling classrooms" (BC Ministry of Education, p. 23). An additional reason is because "trees… remove the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, as well as being home to many species" (Friends of the Earth, p. 7).
2. Take learning outside the classroom.
   There is lots of space on the school grounds, especially on days when shade isn't needed, and teaching and learning about sustainability and the environment is well suited for the outdoors. Outdoor activities could include talking to nearby community members, measuring biodiversity, and observing the natural and urban landscapes in the area (Gibb, p. 16).
3. Organize the school garden.
   There is a lot of potential for the school garden. Even though school is not in session, crops with short maturity lengths could be grown and used for the school breakfast and lunch programs. This could include radishes, lettuce, spinach, herbs, and berries that mature in the spring, such as early strawberries. By organizing who does what and what is planted where, students and staff could be more involved and reap the benefits together. Organizing could start as simple as a schedule and a map after finding out which classes wish to be involved. As stated in the *Sustainable Schools Best Practices Guide,* "involving students in ongoing school garden projects allows them to learn about the cycles of life and engage in fun outdoor learning" (BC Ministry of Education).

Works Cited

BC Ministry of Education. *Sustainable Schools Best Practices Guide*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teaching-tools/environmental-learning/sustbestpractices.pdf.

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