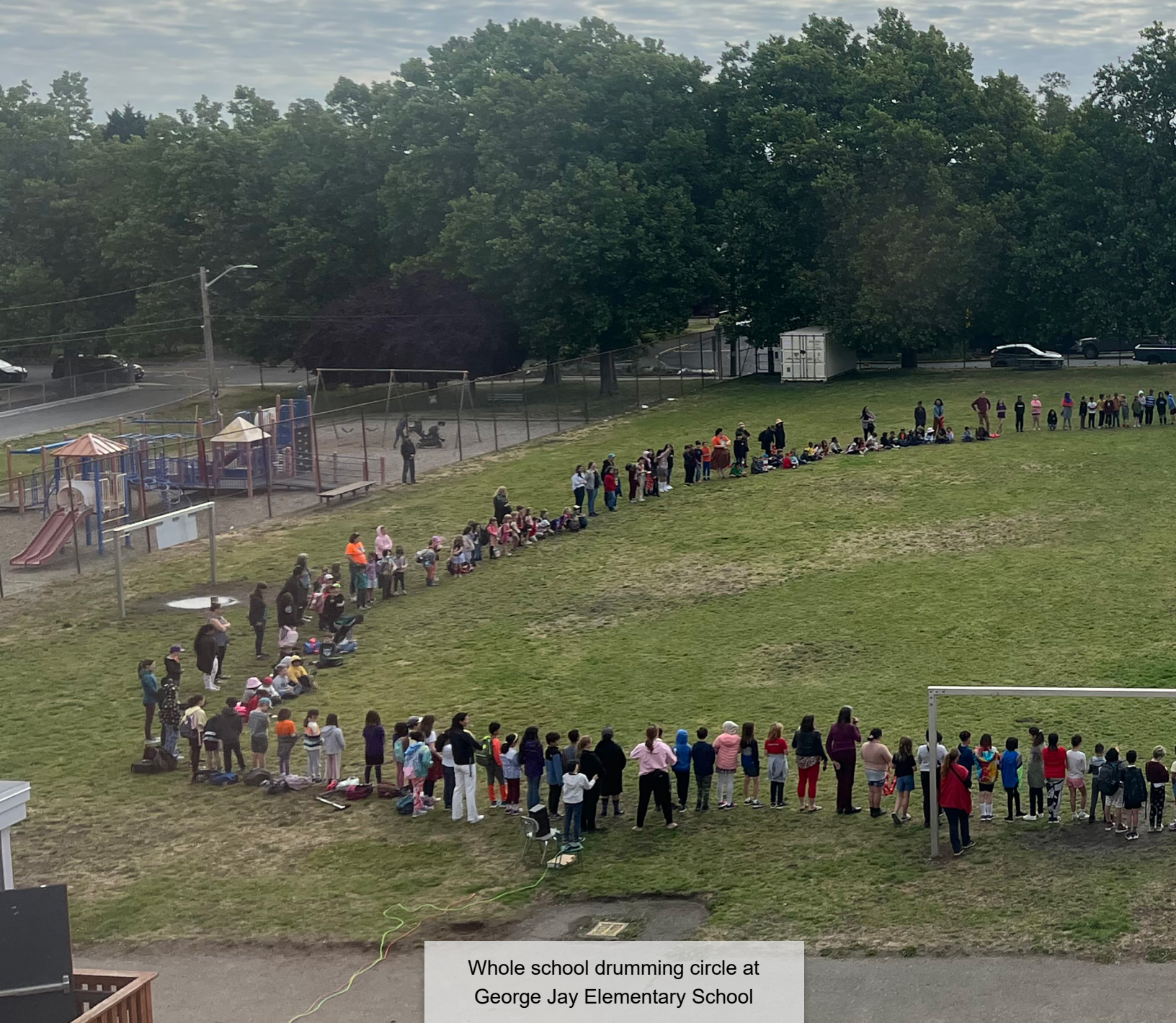


RECONCILIATION

AT GEORGE JAY ELEMENTARY

Embracing Indigenous Culture with Staff Drumming Circles



Whole school drumming circle at
George Jay Elementary School

by
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Schools in the Greater Victoria school district continue to recognize the importance of fostering a sense of inclusivity and diversity within their communities. The incorporation of Indigenous ways of knowing, traditions, and cultures into everyday school life continues to gain momentum, and staff are learning new ways of approaching learning at school. Drumming in schools is an important and enjoyable way to learn about the diverse Indigenous cultures of North America. At George Jay Elementary, we are proud to share that we are growing a drumming culture, and integrating this as an important component of our family breakfast program.

The Feeding Futures Fund program launched in 2023 by the BC government has helped us address the immediate need for feeding students and their families at George Jay. The Fund builds on the progress made with the Student and Family Affordability Fund to help reduce the challenges of rising food costs for families who need it most.

The program has had a significant impact, extending to a weekly family breakfast, support of our Good Food Box and our Backpack Buddies programs, and the availability of healthy daily snacks for our students; many of our families have given feedback about the positive effect the program has had in their lives.

Featuring Indigenous drumming during our weekly Feeding Futures Fund Family Breakfast Program has created a sense of belonging and community within the school, and gives parents and students a

“The breakfast drumming helps me, no matter how I start my morning. When I join the circle with my colleagues, it reenergizes and refocuses me and grounds me in my day.”

George Jay Elementary Teacher

chance to witness staff members actively embracing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) 94 Calls to Action. A parent of two students said that, “I am an immigrant to Canada and I feel like my children are learning about Indigenous culture through community engagement and actions, like when the staff here drum for us during breakfast. I really love that my children are taught about Indigenous cultures, it is important to learn about and understand this as newcomers to Canada.”

From classrooms, staff circles, assemblies, and whole school recognition events, we believe drumming in school is a powerful and meaningful way to celebrate and share the rich and diverse heritage of Indigenous peoples living on the traditional territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.

One parent shared that, “The family breakfast feels like a community, and when the staff drum it feels like the beating of our hearts together as one.”

A Grade 5 student commented that, “I like it when I come to family breakfast! I like the drumming, too, because it is good to acknowledge the Indigenous people of our community. It is also good to be entertained by the staff!”

A Grade 3 student shared that, “The eggs are always good, and listening to the staff drumming makes me feel calm at the start of my day.”

For the George Jay community, family breakfasts are not just about food; they are about coming together as a school family and building our community's capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. When staff members engage in **Reconcilliaction** by actively participating in the drumming circles, they demonstrate their commitment to creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all learners. This, in turn, encourages students and their families to be more engaged with the school and its activities.

“When we drum together in the gym I feel our connection”, said an Educational Assistant. “I believe that this fosters a safe community for all our learners,

“The first time I participated in staff drumming
I was overcome with positive emotions.”

George Jay Elementary Educational Assistant



“When the staff drum I can see the sound coming from their drum.
It makes me feel surrounded by sound waves, and so calm.
I really like to listen to the drumming.”

George Jay Elementary Grade 2 Student

Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff alike.”

When we engage in Indigenous drumming during family breakfasts, it is one example of how schools in our district are moving beyond the conventional boundaries of teaching and learning. For members of the George Jay staff, drumming is an opportunity to embrace Indigenous culture. It is a practice that is deeply rooted in the history of many regions of North America, and that has a profound impact on the lives of Indigenous communities. By integrating this tradition into our school culture, we hope to not only show respect for Indigenous cultures but to provide a platform for students, staff, and community members to connect with local history, music, and traditions of Indigenous peoples in a hands-on and experiential way. We are so thankful for the songs that have been gifted to the school district for all of us to perform and enjoy, including the Celebration song composed and gifted by Bradley Dick, Songhees Nation.

Music has the incredible power to transcend language barriers and unite people from diverse backgrounds. Indigenous drumming, with its mesmerizing rhythms and harmonious chants, brings people together in a unique way. During family breakfasts, there is always laughter. The participation of parents and students

alongside the staff fills the gym with smiles and an energy of joy and gratitude. It is a truly special way to start off a school day.

“Drumming at George Jay feels like inclusion, because when we drum together, we stand shoulder to shoulder no matter what our roles are here at school. When we drum, we are one,” said an Educational Assistant.

We hope our work inspires others to try a staff drumming circle at their school. This shared experience fosters a sense of unity, where everyone feels connected and valued regardless of their cultural background. It sends a clear message that schools are not just places of academic learning but also safe places of cultural exchange and appreciation. By embracing Indigenous traditions in this way, we are working towards a more inclusive and positive future, where diversity is celebrated, and cultural understanding is nurtured.

In the words of a Grade 4/5 teacher, “The drumming culture at our school really helps ground our day in Indigenous practice. It helps bring us together in a strong way. It shows parts of our willingness and understanding by deeply weaving Indigenous pedagogy in all parts of our practices.”



The George Jay Elementary staff drumming circle,
during Family Breakfast, September 2023