

S,DÁYES/Pender Island students enjoy a special history lesson

In 2024 Pender Island School Principal, Margot Landahl requested a copy of the SENĆOTEN Territorial Map documenting the traditional homeland of the W̱SÁNEĆ People to enhance the school's curriculum. On April 29, 2025, W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council Community Engagement Coordinator, Eric Pelkey, presented a replica of the map to Principal Landahl and the Pender Elementary Secondary School. This special ceremonial event was witnessed by five W̱SÁNEĆ Elders, School District representatives, W̱SÁNEĆ guests, and the entire Pender student body.

The map documents the long standing and widespread presence of the W̱SÁNEĆ People throughout what is now called the Southern Gulf Islands. Principal Landahl said: "We are deeply grateful for this map which opens a window for our students to learn the important history of the W̱SÁNEĆ People in their traditional homeland."

An important part of the SENĆOTEN School Map project was the pairing of the grade 7 SENĆOTEN immersion class from the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Secondary School with the grade 7 Pender class. Their day together began with making Bannock around a fire behind the school with School District cultural workers and ended with a gathering at what was once the 4,000-year-old village site of E,H,O, now called Medicine Beach.

After the gifting of the SENĆOTEN Territorial Map, the grade 7 SENĆOTEN immersion class presented a traditional journey song and dance in full regalia before the Pender student body, School District representatives, staff and invited guests. A short video by Kenta Kikuchi that captures the spirit of the event will be available soon.

Following this important cultural presentation, immersion teacher Renee Sampson (S̱XEḎTELISIYE) spoke to all the students in SENĆOTEN telling the W̱SÁNEĆ history of the Islands — ṮEṮÁĆES, the W̱SÁNEĆ "relatives of the deep". And then, repeating the stories in English, stirring the imaginations of all present.

Another highlight was the welcome song by the Pender grade 2 class — delivered with enthusiasm and charm. Some Pender students also shared what was most special for them living on Pender/S,DÁYES.

Hereditary Chief Pelkey (W̱IĆKINEM), great grandson of Hereditary Chief Louis Pelkey who led the ancient village site of QENEN,IW before colonization and displacement, told the story of the creation of the SENĆOTEN Territorial Map. The BC Supreme Court's respectful acceptance of this map was instrumental in gaining greater recognition of W̱SÁNEĆ rights and title under the Douglas Treaty.

Chief Pelkey involved some Pender students in the traditional witnessing ceremony that has played an important part in maintaining W̱SÁNEĆ oral history. Principal Landahl has installed the map in a special cabinet inside the school entrance so all who witness the map in the years to come will gain a deeper appreciation of the long history of W̱SÁNEĆ presence in these special islands — ṮEṮÁĆES — their relatives of the deep.

SENĆOTEN Map Installation- S,DÁYES/Pender Island April 2025

The SENĆOTEN Territorial Map Project was coordinated by the ȚETȚÁĆES Reconcili-Action team in partnership with the WŚÁNEĆ School Board, the Pender Elementary Secondary School, and the WŚÁNEĆ Leadership Council and supported by a grant from the Real Estate Foundation of BC.

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