



## Relationships that Matter:

# A report on the partnership activities of the UBC Learning Exchange and the Vancouver Board of Education

## 2009-2010 School Year



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# Introduction

The UBC Learning Exchange, a community-university engagement initiative based in the Downtown Eastside, has been bringing UBC student volunteers into Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) schools since our inception in 1999. At first, a small number of UBC students were involved in 1:1 literacy tutoring and other activities in Strathcona and Seymour Elementary schools. In the years since 1999, the Learning Exchange and the VBE have expanded their partnership significantly because students, teachers, school administrators, and parents have been so enthusiastic about the benefits of the “learning exchanges” that have been created through having UBC students interacting with children and youth. In the past academic year (2009-2010), almost 1300 UBC students worked with well over 5,000 children and youth in more than 30 Vancouver schools.

UBC students take part in or lead activities such as the following:

- **Literacy and numeracy tutoring during school hours**
- **Curriculum enhancement activities such as hands-on science labs**
- **After-school programs, including sports and recreation activities, and homework clubs**
- **A wide variety of special projects during Reading Week (the university’s spring break in February) including science projects, theatre and other cultural activities, athletic activities and sustainability-oriented projects.**

Several years ago, in recognition of the close alignment between the vision and goals of the two organizations, the VBE and the Learning Exchange developed a memorandum of understanding to formalize and provide direction to their ongoing partnership. The goals of the partnership were articulated as follows:

1. **To strengthen civil society in the Vancouver region;**
2. **To help build strong communities in inner city neighbourhoods that use local schools as bases of activity;**
3. **To strengthen the public school system through the active engagement of learners supported by positive relationships;**
4. **To develop internal and external assets enabling students and their families to better cope with vulnerabilities, avoid vulnerabilities, or both, through social and academic inclusion and**
5. **To build social responsibility and global citizenship values and capacities in all participants: students in VSB schools, UBC students, members of the UBC community and members of local school communities.**

This report outlines the activities undertaken within the framework of this partnership in the last academic year (2009-2010) and describes some of the important outcomes that have resulted.

# Impacts of the Partnership between the Learning Exchange and the Vancouver Board of Education

The partnership with the VBE is vitally important to the Learning Exchange. UBC's vision commits the university to creating an exceptional learning environment that fosters global citizenship and promotes the values of a civil and sustainable society. Having UBC students engaging in public schools, especially inner city schools, where they can play roles as tutors, mentors, and role models is a powerful way to teach students the awareness, values, and practices that are foundational to global citizenship. The activities that students engage in contribute to the strengthening of school communities and their ability to respond to sustainability and other critical issues.

The approach to experiential learning emphasized in Learning Exchange programs is called Community Service Learning (CSL) or service-learning. This approach combines voluntary community service with classroom learning. Real-life experiences in the community are linked to academic content through processes of critical reflection such as journal writing, small group discussion, and the writing of analytical papers. CSL aims to enhance students' capacity to think critically about social issues, to value diversity, and to work collaboratively with others for positive change. Increasingly, the Learning Exchange is working with UBC faculty to integrate students' volunteer work into academic courses. Students are now engaging in Community-Based Research (CBR) as well as CSL, which is the conduct of research that responds to issues or questions the community considers important.

UBC students engage with Vancouver schools through several Learning Exchange programs or initiatives. Some UBC students volunteer in schools for 2 to 3 hours every week during the school term. Last year, these approximately 400 individual placements were coordinated through the Learning Exchange Trek Program. In most cases, students volunteer for these placements because they want to gain volunteer experience and contribute to their communities. Most placements are done outside the context of course work. The annual Reading Week projects are one of the most popular vehicles for doing CSL among UBC students. Last year almost 500 students took part in these projects with 25% of these students doing their project as part of an academic course. Most of the students who take part in CSL projects as part of their coursework get involved through the UBC-Community Learning Initiative, the part of the Learning Exchange that works closely with faculty members to develop courses that incorporate CSL or CBR projects. Last year, almost 400 students did course-based CSL or CBR projects in schools through the UBC-CLI.

UBC students report that their experiences in the schools have powerful impacts. They have a chance to develop new skills or discover skills they did not know they had. They gain increased clarity on their career goals, sometimes being inspired to become teachers (or learning that they really are



not suited to a teaching career). They understand concretely some of the challenges faced by children from low-income, or immigrant, Aboriginal, or single-parent families. They understand the challenges faced by inner city schools with limited resources and high levels of need. But perhaps more importantly, UBC students come to understand that despite these challenges, individual children, and teachers, and entire schools can show impressive resiliency and creativity in the midst of difficult situations.

The partnership has significant benefits for children and youth in Vancouver schools as well as for UBC students. VBE students get the chance to connect with someone who is old enough to be a role model but not so far removed in age to be intimidating. For many inner city children, this may be the first time they have met someone who has been to university. These relationships not only have direct benefits in areas such as literacy and numeracy, but in some cases, they also inspire children to expand their thinking about how their own future might unfold. Teachers consistently say that the contact with UBC students is inspiring VBE students to be more motivated to learn and stay in school.

In addition to the benefits for individual VBE students, many of the projects that UBC students have completed over the years have left significant legacies in school communities, including enhanced school gardens, improved playgrounds, additions to curricular resource materials, and improved aesthetics in schools through the creation of wall murals and other artistic works.

## Overview of Activities in the 2009-2010 School Year

Learning Exchange staff and UBC students work with VBE teachers and administrators to offer a wide variety of enriched learning experiences to VBE students. Many of these activities are partially funded by a gift to the Learning Exchange from HSBC Bank Canada. The activities are intended to help the VBE and individual schools achieve their priority goals. The activities that are associated with particular goals are listed below and described briefly in the following paragraphs. A map that identifies the schools where these activities take place is given in an appendix to this report.

### **Literacy:**

Literacy Mentors  
Creative Writing Projects  
Reading Week Projects

### **Math:**

JUMP Math Mentors  
TOTEM (Teaching Others to Enjoy Math)

### **Science:**

Let's Talk Science Mentors  
SMarRT (Scientific Methods and Research Training Program)  
Science in Action in After School Programs  
Reading Week Projects

### **Health & Wellness:**

Athletics: I'm Going to UBC  
Nutrition and Wellness  
Welcome to My Life; Boys 4 Real  
Reading Week Projects

### **Sustainability:**

Reading Week Projects  
Clean Energy Audits  
Think and Eat Green @ Schools Project

### **Other:**

Classroom Support  
After-School Activities  
Chapman Summer Projects  
Engaging Neighbourhoods  
ESL Conversation Program for Parents

# Literacy Placements and Projects

## Literacy Mentors

The UBC Literacy Mentors facilitate children's reading practice sessions, helping children to better understand what they are reading and to increase their fluency. They also support children with their Language Arts assignments and engage children through a variety of literacy games. In response to teacher feedback, they also assist students with reading comprehension in other subject areas, such as math. Fifty-nine literacy mentors, worked alongside 620 children from Kindergarten to Grade 7 in seven elementary schools: Grandview, Mount Pleasant, Queen Alexandra, Queen Victoria Annex, Admiral Seymour, Strathcona, and Tillicum Annex Elementary Schools.

## Creative Writing Projects

UBC students in an introductory creative writing course taught poetry and English grammar to VBE students using lesson plans they developed. Activities centered on basic literacy, emotive writing, fiction, poetry, playwriting, and story writing. Students also devised a thesaurus game to develop literacy. UBC students shared their lessons and reflections with one another via a website they designed.

**"This student and I have continued to work together over the last few months. I have seen her grow more confident in both her reading skills and herself. This may have nothing to do with me, though I love the idea that I may have played even a tiny part in it. There is a small chance that when this girl looks back on her days in elementary school and forms her own list of influential people that I might make an appearance. Even if I do not make her list, she has most certainly made mine."**

-Stephanie McGee, UBC Literacy Mentor  
Queen Alexandra Elementary School



## Reading Week Projects

Every February, the Learning Exchange collaborates with other UBC units and a corporate partner, SAP, a global software development company, to bring groups of UBC students to schools where they do three-day long projects related to a wide variety of learning goals and topics, including literacy. In 2010, the ninth year these projects have been done, the UBC Reading Week program connected almost 500 UBC students with almost 2500 VBE students. They completed 20 projects in 16 elementary schools.

An example of a Reading Week project with a literacy theme took place at Queen Alexandra Elementary. Every class in the school worked on different aspects of literacy, with help from their UBC mentors. The grade 5 class wrote their own script about bullying, acted it out and filmed it, creating a mini movie. Another class wrote their own legends and produced their own book based on aboriginal legends they had learned about in class. At the end of the week the school held a school-wide literacy fair where all the students' works were displayed for parents, staff and community members.

# Math Placements and Projects

## JUMP Math Mentors

UBC students receive training on how to use the JUMP Math approach and then are placed in classrooms where teachers are using this approach. The UBC mentors circulate throughout the class, supporting students with their math assignments. In addition, some teachers get the JUMP Math Mentors to work one-to-one with students who they feel could especially benefit from individualized attention. The mentors worked with 148 children in grades 2 to 7 in MacDonald, Admiral Seymour, Queen Alexandra, and Mount Pleasant Elementary Schools.

**"I have been volunteering once a week at MacDonald Elementary school as a JUMP Math mentor for Grade 6 and 7 students. I enjoy volunteering and helping the students gain a greater understanding with math concepts and numbers. Being around the students gives me inspiration. Every time I show up to volunteer, I see the students excited to learn. This excitement further motivates me to continue contributing and volunteering with the school and students."**

~Melissa Tong, UBC JUMP Math Mentor



## TOTEM

Two "Teaching Others to Enjoy Math" projects took place during the 2010 UBC Reading Week break: one at Britannia Elementary and the other at Macdonald Elementary. The project at Britannia Elementary, "Math Behind the Olympics," connected 27 Grade 7 students with a group of 10 very keen UBC students. They worked to understand some difficult math concepts using Olympic-themed activities. For example, the Grade 7 students learned about speed, distance, and velocity by racing down the gym in bobsleds made with their UBC mentors. The Grade 7 students were put to the test when they had

to explain these concepts to the grades 3 to 6 students in the school. Through this approach, the UBC students were able to reach an even greater number of students than just the grade 7 class, while encouraging the grade 7 students to take on a leadership role and creating school-wide excitement about the project.

At Macdonald Elementary, UBC students worked with Grade 3-6 students to explore how science and math appear everywhere in our lives. Investigating questions such as, "What are the black dots that grow on our bread?" "How do plants absorb water?" "What kinds of fats are bad for you?" And, "What is the chemical reaction that creates an erupting volcano?" 18 UBC students and 16 Grade 3 to 6 students used the scientific method to develop hands-on and brain-stimulating activities. These young investigators improved their numeracy and critical-thinking skills through analyzing the results of their experiments and creating an interactive poster display. The three days of hard work paid off at the Science Fair where the students educated their peers, parents, and teachers about their projects.

**"Two students were able to move to the next grade level and complete a year and a half of math in one academic year. These students are in grade 7 and were two grade levels below where they should be. Both have special needs designations. Now they have moved up to Grade 6 and are doing very well at that level."**

~Joyita Rubin, Teacher,  
MacDonald Elementary

# Science Placements and Projects

## Let's Talk Science Mentorship Program

UBC graduate and undergraduate students bring their expertise in science to their mentoring work with youth at Britannia and Templeton Secondary Schools. The UBC and secondary students work together to develop a project idea, conduct experiments, collect and analyze data, and produce a project for the school science fair. This past year 38 UBC students worked with 80 students at Britannia Secondary, and 12 UBC students worked with 22 students at Templeton High School. Students were fully engrossed as they built catapults and generators, experimented with optical illusions, tested the effectiveness of cleaning supplies, and even fed chocolate to bean plants. Once started, the process took on a life of its own. Students started to ask more questions and through self-driven trial and error, started to discover that “truth” can be elusive. A number of students went on to compete at the Regional Science Fair, where two projects from Britannia Secondary received medals.

## SMaRT Program

The Learning Exchange collaborates with the UBC Let's Talk Science Partnership Program to coordinate the Scientific Methods and Research Training Program. In 2009-2010, there was an overwhelming response from UBC science students who wanted to share their enthusiasm and love of science with elementary students. Fifty-eight UBC students conducted hands-on experiments in 15 classrooms with almost 400 students in four elementary schools: Grandview, Strathcona, Nightingale, and Laura Secord Elementary Schools. This was an increase of 100 children (or 32%) over the previous year.

## Science in Action in After-School Programs

As part of a Biology course, eight UBC students conducted a series of after-school visits to implement science activities at Hastings Elementary Kids First and Strathcona Community Centre. Over 100 elementary students had the opportunity to participate in these fun and engaging after-school activities.

## Reading Week Projects

Several projects had science-related themes in 2010. For example, at General Gordon Elementary, projects explored questions such as, “What would your life be like without the car, the doorknob, or the pencil sharpener?” These questions were explored by Grade 4 and 5 students as they rotated through five different activity stations that featured the pulley, lever, wheel, and inclined plane. Facilitated by eager UBC science students who gave demonstrations and answered questions, the fun culminated with games and group presentations by the whole class.



**“UBC students were role modeling, while our students were learning and linking all the learning from what they had done in class with what the SMaRT program was bringing. UBC students were thinking out loud...and it was great for my students to be part of that.**

~Karen Nesmith, Teacher,  
Strathcona Elementary

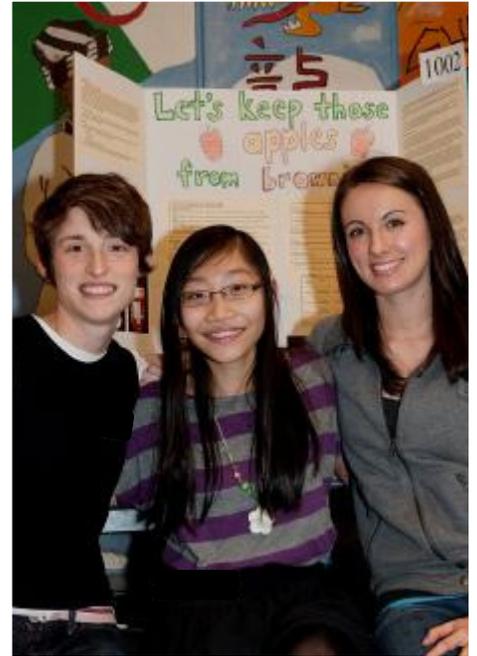
# Health and Wellness Placements and Projects

## I'm Going to UBC

Varsity athletes and coaches host an afternoon of events for students in grades 4-7 who travel by bus to the UBC campus. UBC Varsity athletes take children on a campus tour, lead a sports skills clinic and then the children attend a Varsity game, complete with pizza. Athletes discuss a range of topics, from nutrition to the importance of regular practice for skill-building, as well as talking about how athletics can be a pathway to a university education. Last year, 50 Varsity Athletes hosted 280 VBE students on campus.

## Nutrition and Wellness

UBC students in a Food, Nutrition, and Health course developed train-the-trainer materials to be used by high school students leading an out-of-school cooking program for elementary students. UBC students hosted one training session for high school student leaders, followed by two mentoring sessions where the UBC students coached the high school students on how to use lesson plans and other resources. A second group of UBC students in the same course developed a nutrition workshop for grade 10 students designed to promote positive health behaviours and change negative health behaviours. The workshop was delivered to three Food Studies 10 classes and one Planning 10 class. A third group developed and implemented a nutrition workshop for a Grade 3 class that built on the provincial Healthy Living Curriculum. The workshop provided students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to make healthy and safe food choices. The final group developed and implemented a similar three-part nutrition workshop series for an ESL Kindergarten class.



## YWCA Welcome to My Life and Boys 4 Real Programs

UBC students act as facilitators and mentors in these two YWCA programs which help Grade 7 girls and boys prepare for the transition to high school by promoting self-esteem, healthy lifestyle choices and positive peer culture.

## Reading Week Projects

At Laura Secord Elementary, 10 UBC students in Rehabilitation Science worked with a Grade 4 class to help them create a presentation about the misuse of substances such as tobacco and alcohol. On the first day of the project, the children listened to mini-lectures about substance misuse and learned facts about each substance, followed by group discussions. Over the second and third day, the UBC students worked with the elementary students to research the negative effects of substance misuse as well as effective strategies for preventing misuse. Each VBE student created a poster board and delivered a presentation for the rest of their class at the end of the third day.

**"We have a few kids that would be completely lost if we didn't have one-to-one support. They simply would not be successful in school."**

~Bonnie Kent, Vice-Principal, Queen Victoria Annex

# Sustainability Placements and Projects

## Reading Week Projects

Every year, a significant number of Reading Week projects focus on sustainability themes as this is a major strategic priority for both UBC and the VBE. For example, last year, 42 UBC students worked with 200 elementary students at Mount Pleasant Elementary to develop four projects that built students' awareness and knowledge of sustainability and the relationship between humans and the environment. Children from K-3 rotated through hands-on science activities about biodiversity in BC. Grade 4 and 5 students learned about recycling by creating art using water bottles. Grade 6 students worked with Shaun Phillips, artist-in-residence at the school, to write and prepare props for a play about sustainability. Grade 7 students took photographs of their surroundings and assembled a digital photo essay on sustainability. The 3 day project culminated in an evening open house where all projects were showcased.

## Clean Energy

Through the Clean Energy Research Centre in the Faculty of Applied Science, engineering students at the Masters level worked in 11 elementary and secondary schools to conduct energy audits of school buildings. In addition to providing reports with key recommendations detailing where energy improvements could be made, some students also gave oral presentations to VBE staff and students outlining the case for energy conservation based on their findings.

## Think and Eat Green @ Schools Project

The Learning Exchange is providing support to this Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) project initiated by instructors in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems and the Faculty of Education. UBC students are working with over 20 school and community organizations that are collaborating on the project. The project is connecting VBE students' experiences with food security, health and environmental issues and helping schools lighten their environmental impact. To date, UBC students have surveyed schools to determine how many are currently undertaking food-related sustainability projects; to identify the scope and characteristics of these projects; and, determine how many schools are interested in starting new food-related sustainability projects.



# Other Placements and Projects

## Classroom Support

This past year, 57 UBC students worked as primary classroom assistants, French immersion assistants, resource class assistants, high school science mentors, and PE assistants.

## After School Activities

**Homework Clubs:** 55 UBC students provided mentorship and help with homework to 370 elementary and secondary school students at a number of schools including: Strathcona Elementary First Nations Homework Club, Franklin Elementary, Britannia Secondary, and the LIFT Program (which has multiple feeder schools).



**Recreational clubs and special events:** UBC students engaged with more than 320 VBE students in the Grandview Visions 180, Hastings Kids First, Strathcona Community Centre, and Tillicum Annex Early Dismissal programs.

## Chapman Summer Projects

A generous donation from Dr. Lloyd and Mrs. Kay Chapman, two former UBC students, enables the Learning Exchange to offer financial awards to UBC students who undertake special projects in collaboration with a community partner. Five UBC students received awards to implement asset-based community development projects within four schools during the summer of 2010. For example, one project at Britannia Secondary developed curriculum materials for Grade 11 students designed to increase their science literacy and awareness of science-related occupations and also developed resources for teachers. Another project engaged youth from Mt. Pleasant Elementary school, LIFT, and Kimount Boys and Girls Club in the cultivation of a garden thereby teaching them about sustainability and food security issues.

## Engaging Neighbourhoods

The Learning Exchange is collaborating with the VBE, the United Way of the Lower Mainland, the City of Vancouver, and several community-based organizations in two areas in East Vancouver to explore new ways that UBC can more effectively use community development principles and practices to respond to community-identified priorities (in this case, the priority issue is the well-being of children in the 7 to 14 age range). In the Renfrew-Collingwood area, we are working with elementary school principals to identify a youth engagement initiative that will utilize the resources of the University, including students and instructors, to respond to one or two priority areas identified through the recent MDI studies. In Victoria-Fraserview we enlisted and supported a team of UBC students to work with students from David Thompson to organize a series of community dinners to elicit input from residents about how children and youth can be supported by the community more effectively. The first community dinner was held in June. It was attended by 60 people of all ages, many of whom were not already active in the community.

# Program for Parents

## ESL Conversation Program for Parents

In an effort to assist the VBE in reaching its goals around increasing the involvement of immigrant parents in the school community, the Learning Exchange has adapted the ESL Conversation Program that has been so successful at our Downtown Eastside storefront and has started ESL programs for parents in several Vancouver schools. The conversation groups are facilitated by specially-trained volunteers to create informal, peer-led environments where learners feel comfortable practicing their English. These school-based ESL groups are funded by the Ministry of Education.

In 2008, the program was launched at Strathcona School, where an innovative partnership was set up with the VBE Continuing and International Education Department. This past year, the program was developed in two new schools, Mount Pleasant and Grenfell Elementary Schools. This partnership offers enhanced learning opportunities to both ESL learners and volunteer facilitators. The learners are able to access the VBE's Foundation curriculum, which can lead to high-school completion, while volunteers have the chance, in some classes, to work alongside and learn from a CIE Department instructor.

This past year, more than 100 learners participated in conversation groups in the three schools. Most learners are Cantonese speakers, but languages from all around the world are represented in the program, including Croatian, Japanese, Sinhalese and Urdu. The program offers four classes per week at Strathcona School (along with another four classes offered by the CIE Department), and two classes per week at Mount Pleasant and Grenfell schools. Average attendance in each class is around five learners. Ten volunteers from varying backgrounds have been facilitating the sessions.

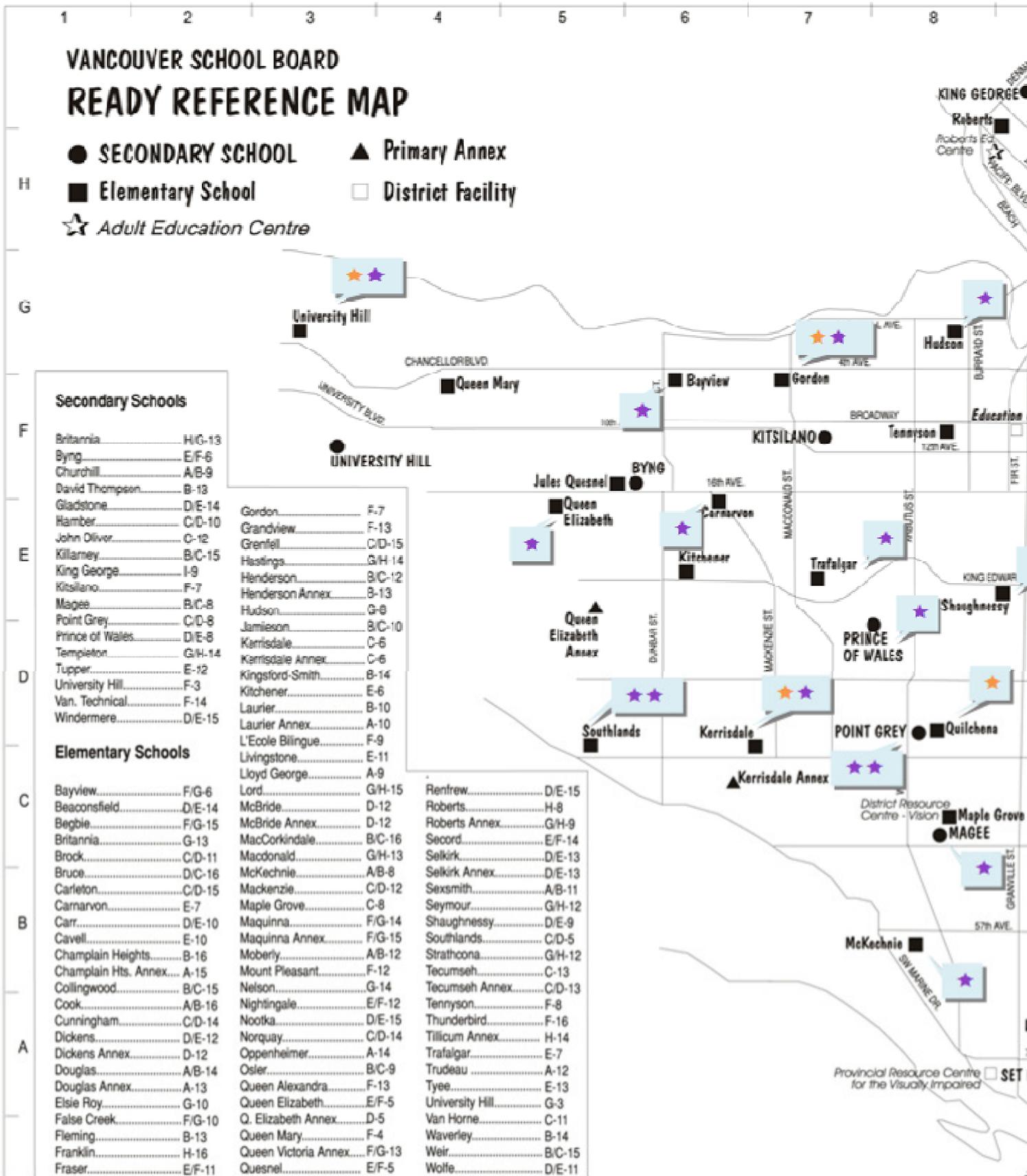


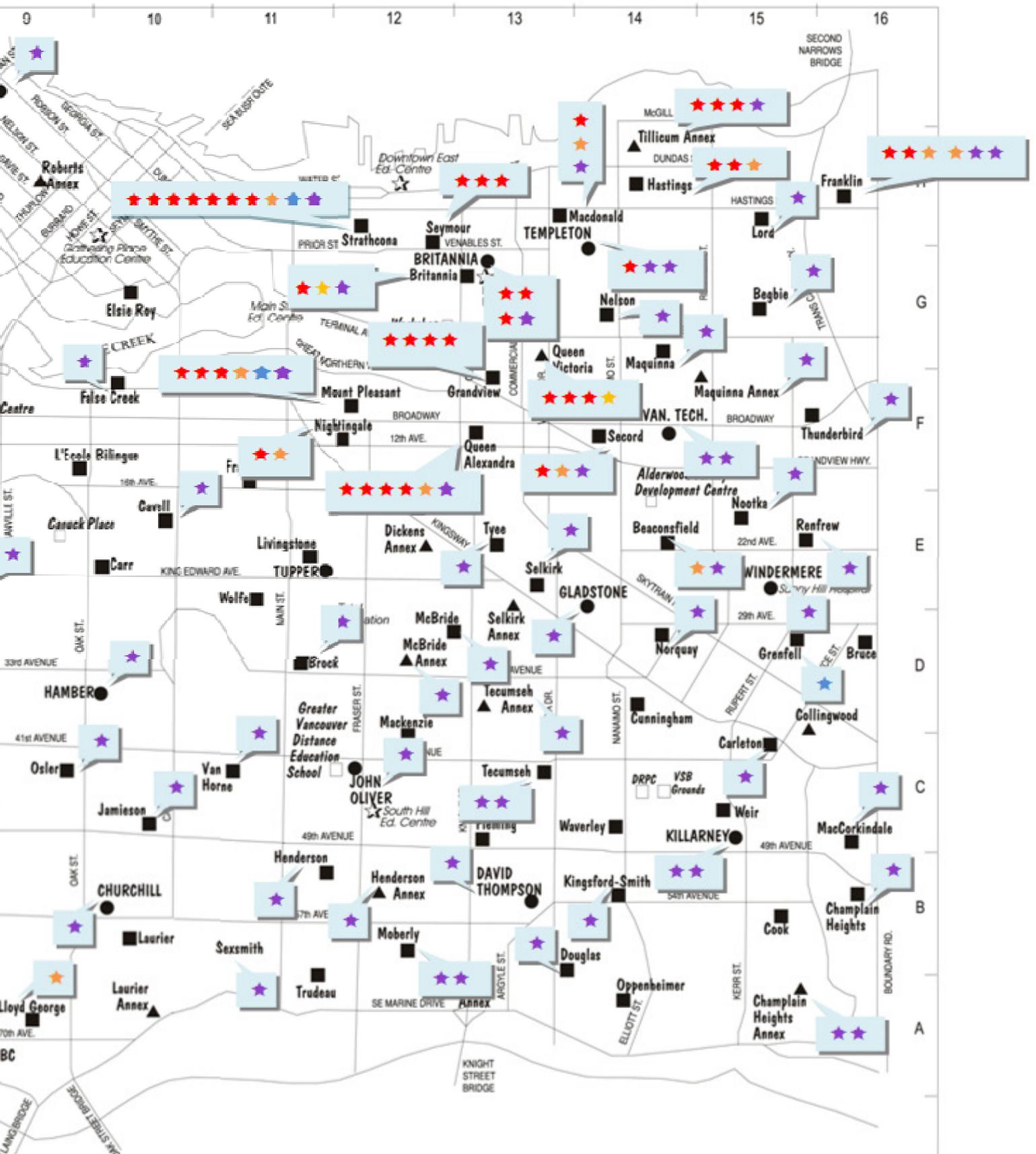


**The UBC Learning Exchange looks forward to the continuing success of our partnership with the Vancouver Board of Education.**

Appendix A: VBE Schools in Partnership with the UBC Learning Exchange & UBC Community Learning In

★ Trak Program    ★ Reading Week Project    ★ ESL Program    ★ Community Learning





**UBC Learning Exchange  
612 Main Street  
Vancouver, BC V6A 2V3**

**Ph: 604.408.5164**

**[www.learningexchange.ubc.ca](http://www.learningexchange.ubc.ca)**