

JAMES BAY LOWLANDS SECONDARY SCHOOL
& MOOSONEE DISTRICT SCHOOL AREA BOARD

CREATING F IN THE FAR



AT A GLANCE

JAMES BAY LOWLANDS SECONDARY SCHOOL BOARD & MOOSONEE DISTRICT SCHOOL AREA BOARD

WHAT: Integrated K-12 public education system serving 455 students with innovative programs in literacy, STEAM, skilled trades, and community partnerships

WHERE: Moosonee, Ontario

WEBSITE: www.jblssb.ca

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**HOW A REMOTE ONTARIO
SCHOOL SYSTEM TURNS
ISOLATION INTO INNOVATION
WHILE PREPARING STUDENTS
FOR JOBS THAT DON'T YET
EXIST IN THEIR COMMUNITY**

In the remote town of Moosonee, Ontario, where students arrive by helicopter when the river ice breaks, an educational transformation is taking place. The James Bay Lowlands school system has reimagined what K-12 education can achieve when traditional boundaries disappear.

“We still have separate titles, but we don’t really operate based on our titles. It is definitely a K to 12,” says Angela Tozer, who serves as Director of Education for both the James Bay Lowlands

Secondary School Board and Moosonee District School Area Board. Since the Ontario Ministry approved this dual director position in April 2022, the schools have functioned as an integrated system serving approximately 455 students from kindergarten through grade twelve.

The unified approach addresses unique challenges in this community accessible only by train, plane, or winter ice road. About one third of Northern Lights Secondary School's 210 students commute from Moose Factory Island, requiring careful coordination with helicopter transport providers. Moosonee Public School serves 245 students in grades JK through 8, while maintaining close ties with its secondary counterpart.

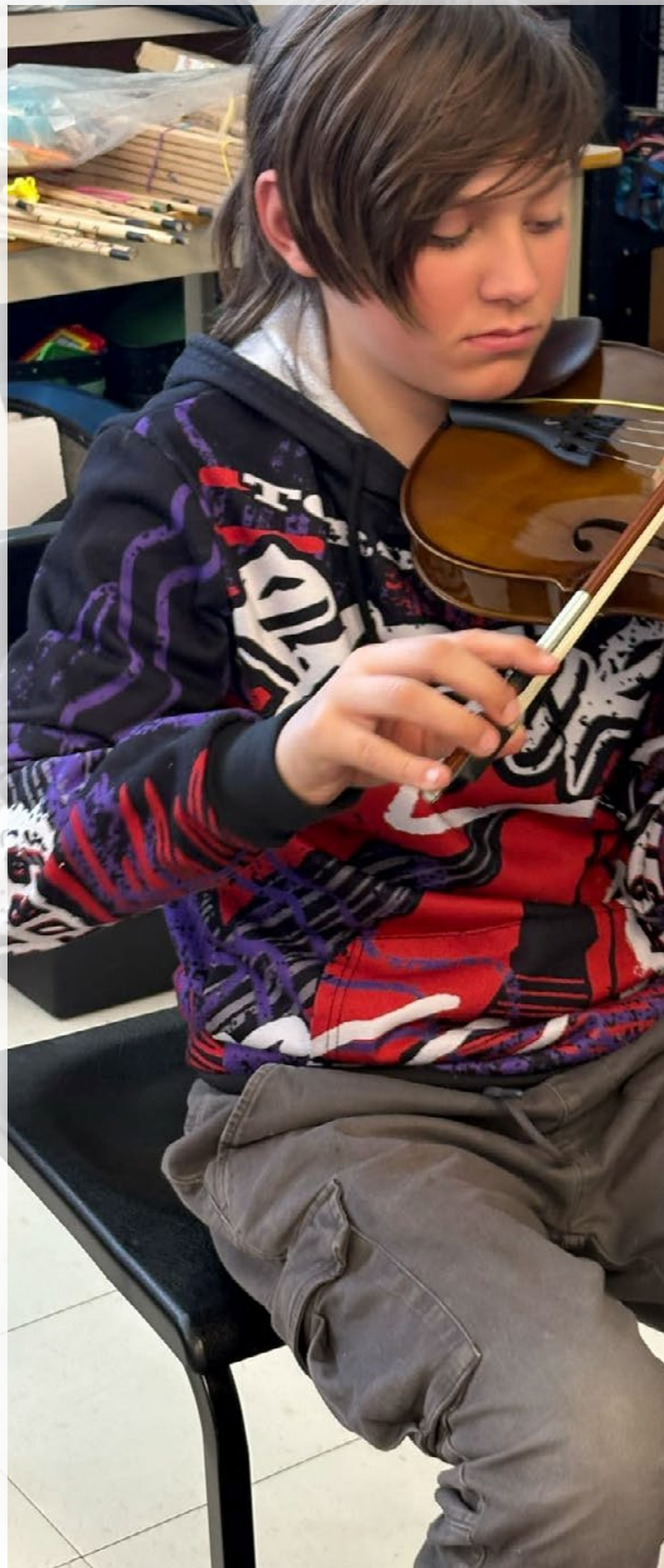
"Everything we're doing with our school system is looking at aligning resources and practices and making a difference for our students," Tozer explains. The schools operate under shared priorities of meaningful connections and powerful learning opportunities, though they maintain separate board trustees and finances. This structure allows them to pool resources effectively while respecting governance requirements.

BRIDGING GENERATIONS THROUGH ART AND LEARNING

When kindergarten students at Moosonee Public School drew monster designs last Halloween, they never imagined their creations would come to life through the hands of high school art students. This intergenerational project exemplifies how the James Bay Lowlands schools create authentic learning experiences that strengthen community bonds.

"The kindergarten students had designed monsters, and they wanted to bring them to life," explains Wanda Zelau, Principal of Moosonee Public School. "So, the teacher connected with the art teacher at the high school, and her students were able to create the monsters from the designs." The kindergarten children then visited Northern Lights Secondary School to meet the artists who transformed their drawings into three-dimensional sculptures.

"Our grade nines made their little monster models out of plaster and clay, then had them on display





as a gallery in the library,” says Principal Shawn Klingenberg of Northern Lights Secondary School. “It’s the third time we’ve done this now. Our students and staff all really look forward to it.” The project carries special meaning in this tight-knit Cree community where high school students often have younger siblings or cousins in elementary grades.

The monster project represents just one example of systematic grade eight transition activities. Science department leads regularly invite grade eight students to experience high school laboratories, working with microscopes and conducting experiments. Technology teachers bring middle schoolers into woodworking shops for hands-on activities.

“This helps them immensely because they become very familiar with the high school and the staff, which lessens their anxiety,” notes Zelau. The schools also coordinate a formal transition program each May, plus involvement in February’s career fair where students meet with Northern College representatives, employers, and community agencies.

EARLY LITERACY AND BEYOND

Every morning at Moosonee Public School, students set aside their regular subjects for 40 minutes of focused literacy development. The Foundations program has transformed how the school approaches reading instruction, creating remarkable results among its predominantly Indigenous student population.

“From K to eight, we do Foundations daily,” says Zelau. “The primary groups are early in the morning, and the junior intermediate are later. I was able to visit the kindergarten classroom when they were doing a Foundations lesson, and I was so impressed with the engagement of all our students.”

The program’s success lies in its innovative structure. Rather than keeping students in traditional grade-level classrooms, Foundations groups learners by ability across multiple grades. Additional staff members join regular teachers, creating smaller instructional groups tailored to each student’s reading level.



Tozer elaborates on the program's collaborative approach: "If you're teaching a grade three class, you may have three or four different levels of readers. But with Foundations, our students move and there's more staff brought in. You have smaller learning groups and everybody's working together."

STEAM PATHWAYS AND HANDS-ON LEARNING

Northern Lights Secondary School has transformed a

teacher's engineering background into an innovative technology design course that bridges mathematics and practical skills. The program addresses a critical transition between grade nine and ten mathematics while introducing students to 3D modeling and programming.

"He did a lot of programming development and 3D printing, had students working with programs to develop 3D models and actually create them,"



explains Klingenberg. “He had wildly popular fidget designs that the students developed. They designed their own tactile fidget toys on a computer program, then were able to create a 3D model and print out the actual piece.”

Every grade ten student takes this bridging course, developing both numeracy skills and technical competencies. The school partners with Let’s Talk Science, which visited twice this year to deliver

specialized STEM lessons. Students also work with programmable robots in grade ten, building coding skills essential for modern careers.

The upcoming hospital construction presents unprecedented opportunities for skilled trades education. With Pomerleau Healthcare Partners beginning work on the \$1.8 billion facility, the schools are developing partnerships to prepare students for employment in construction trades.

“We’re really hoping to partner. It’s so hard to have skilled trades teachers that are designated and teaching in your schools,” says Tozer. “But if we could do some partnering and have an electrician come in for a week to do a module with our students, or a carpenter or a steel worker, that’s going to be amazing opportunities we could be building on.”

The school’s Specialist High Skills Major in health and wellness connects grade eleven and twelve students with Northern College dual credit programs, co-op



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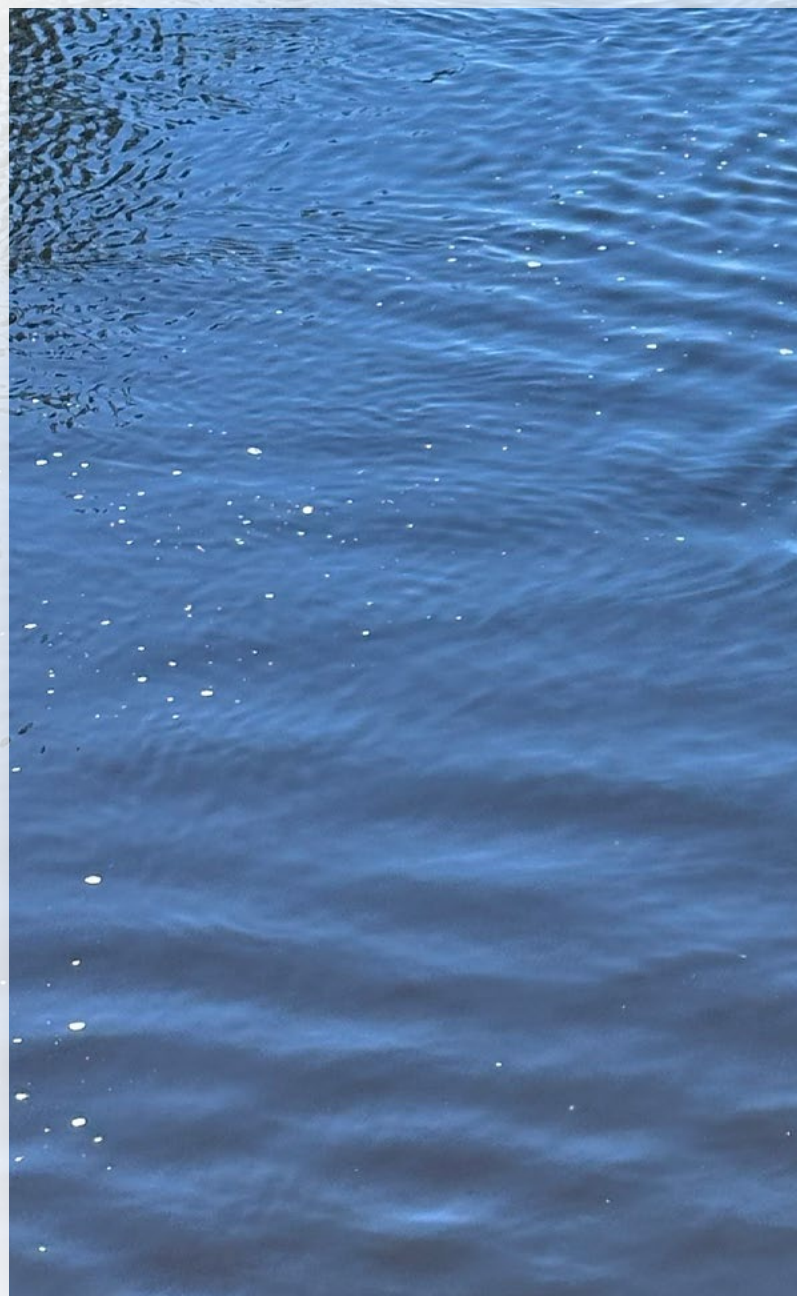
placements at community partners, and certifications including first aid and concussion awareness.

PREPARING FOR LIFE AFTER MOOSONEE

Leaving an isolated community for post-secondary education requires more than academic preparation. The James Bay Lowlands schools have developed comprehensive support systems that dramatically improved student retention rates at colleges and universities across Ontario.

“In 2017, we had a lot of students that had gone out to post-secondary programs and were back in our community by October,” recalls Tozer. “We did a deep dive at the high school to figure out how that was happening and how we could better support.”

The solution emerged as a multi-faceted approach centered on a mandatory GLS 40 course in the first semester. Students spend the entire term researching programs, securing financing, and addressing practical challenges of southern living.



The curriculum covers everything from navigating public transit to understanding meal plans.

“If you’re going to London, how does public transit work? Is it free for students? How do you get your pass?” explains Klingenberg. “There’s no public transportation in Moosonee, so it’s something that’s foreign to students but really a huge part of student life when you’re in a post-secondary institution.”

Each spring, grade eleven and twelve students board the train for a transformative journey to Timmins, North Bay, and Sudbury. They stay in residence halls,



meet faculty in their chosen programs, and explore campuses firsthand.

SOCCER, MUSIC, AND COMMUNITY SPIRIT

Every evening from April through June, the arena in Moosonee transforms into an indoor soccer pitch where more than half of Northern Lights Secondary School's students compete in an intramural league that has become the heartbeat of the community.

"We have four soccer teams that play every evening from four to five," says Klingenberg. "We create a 14-game league. We've invited the OPP to participate

just as a healthy opportunity to play with students. We have about 90 students, so over half our student population commits to this program."

The soccer program's unique jersey design contest engages students creatively each March. Students submit logo designs, vote on favorites, and see their artwork transformed into team uniforms by Daystar Stitching in Timmins.

"This year we have the Goal Rushers, like 'gold rush' but spelled G-O-A-L, the Banana Splits, the G-O-A-T-S as an acronym for Greatest of All Time, and



the Black Widows with a big spider on their jersey,” Klingenberg explains. “We even have post-secondary students now in university who show up every day at four o’clock just to watch and be part of that program.”

Music education received a major boost through a \$20,000 MusiCounts grant that brought fiddle instruction to every grade level. Strings Across the Sky musicians spent a week teaching students from kindergarten through grade eight, culminating in a community performance.

“We got 30 fiddles into the school,” notes Tozer. “We also have two fiddle groups now: the Fiddle Club and the MPS Fiddleheads. We had a virtual fiddle instructor to support the program in the fall.” The

school choir performs at community events, elder gatherings, and recently placed highly in the Ontario Music Festival virtual competition.

LOOKING AHEAD: INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPPORTUNITIES

Recent infrastructure investments have transformed both the learning environment and safety protocols across the James Bay Lowlands schools. A new HVAC system at Moosonee Public School ensures proper air quality, while innovative washroom renovations at Northern Lights Secondary School have dramatically reduced disciplinary incidents.

“We’ve made all our student bathrooms single use,” explains Tozer. “They’re floor to ceiling partitions with mirrors inside and a little shelf. You go out into



the common space, which opens into the hall, with an open hand washing station. It's very welcoming."

Klingenberg confirms the impact: "We've seen a significant reduction in the number of suspendable issues because the supervised spaces are better laid out. Our students feel much safer in the building now."

The new hospital construction promises to reshape career opportunities for students. Pomerleau Construction has already engaged with co-op classes, offering site tours and outlining the skilled trades needed throughout the project's timeline.

"Our grade 11 and 12 students went on site both semesters," says Tozer. "The contractor has shared

with us the various trades that are going to be needed. We have to prepare our students for that job market."

For the elementary school, Zelau focuses on strengthening teacher support: "I want to continue having professional learning opportunities for our staff. When teachers are informed and better supported, they create powerful learning opportunities for our students."

As Tozer approaches retirement in August, she reflects on the schools' achievements: "Our schools up here are phenomenal. What we do up here matters. The learning opportunities and possibilities we can offer are not second-rate. I think we're above the curve most times."

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