

A short history of the Pow Wow at Earl Marriott Secondary

Earl Marriott Secondary has a long and proud history of Indigenous Learning and community Pow Wow celebrations. For more than 25 years, Earl Marriott Secondary has been home to the First Nations Program.

In 1996, Principal Ms. Margaux Molson and Earl Marriott teacher Mr. Andrew Holland built a fledgling First Nations Program to support our First Nations students. The program was one of the first in the Surrey School District and it was the vision of the former Semiahmoo First Nation (SFN) Grand Chief Bernard Charles. Chief Charles believed in education as a way forward for Earl Marriott's First Nations students. Principal Molson and the staff were united in Chief Charles' vision to build and maintain a strong First Nations Program. One of the early, notable events for the Earl Marriott First Nations Program were attending two field trips to the Gathering of the Nations Pow Wow in Albuquerque, New Mexico with Mr. Holland and teacher chaperones. Here students experienced the power and strength of Pow Wow as a collective group. Following the New Mexico trip, Earl Marriott staff and students embarked on their own plans to bring the energy and power they experienced to our community by hosting Pow Wow's at Earl Marriott. Subsequently, under the direction of First Nations teacher Ms. Sonia Blair, students attended a major Pow Wow in Maui, Hawaii. Although not a Coast Salish tradition, the opportunity to engage EMS students in Pow Wow was invigorating for students and staff. The students and staff never wavered and the Pow Wow was here to stay.

Throughout the next two decades, the Pow Wow took on a spirit of its own, with the Semiahmoo First Nation (SFN) and their elders playing an important role in the celebrations at the school. During non-Pow Wow times the First Nations Program continued its learning and work by holding drum making workshops and attending leadership conferences. The medicine wheel teachings and the sense of belonging that these events brought became a pillar of the First Nations Program and First Nations learning at EMS.

From 2005 onward and under the direction EMS teacher Mr. Michael Mackay-Dunn, the Pow Wow experienced tremendous success. The Pow Wow became both a family and community event that was not to be missed. Under the guidance of Mr. Mackay-Dunn, Surrey School District officials and the Semiahmoo First Nation (SFN),

Indigenous Learning became part of the school's cultural fabric and eventually the impetus for the design, carving and installation of the Cen'Alien House Posts in the school's entrance / foyer. These spectacular welcome posts were the work of Semiahmoo First Nation (SFN) master-carver Leonard Wells who carved the posts at his workshop at Earl Marriott. The project was completed in 2014 under the Principalship of Mr. Peter Johnston.

From 2005-2019 the Pow Wow experienced further growth and interest within the community with the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation guiding the school and community forward. Mr. Michael Mackay-Dunn's vision for the program provided opportunities of a lifetime for EMS students by planning three successful field trips to Haida Gwaii.

In 2023, under the Principalship of Ms. Claudine Davies, the Pow Wow has made its successful return to EMS after Covid-19 interrupted the Pow Wow. Under the supervision of Principal Davies and teacher sponsors Mr. Mark Figueira and Ms. Keely Speechley as well as Semiahmoo First Nations Chief Harley Chappell and Counselor Ms. Joanne Charles, the school re-opened its doors to the Pow Wow celebrations. The school and community welcomed back an unprecedented number of dancers, drum groups, vendors and visitors to the school. Students and staff alike are excited for the next chapter of the EMS / Semiahmoo First Nation Pow Wow at the school; an event that is surely not to be missed.