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Black Press



Sean Nosek is now principal at Thomas Haney secondary, where he began as a teacher 17 years ago.

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Contributed

RCMP seized \$30,000 worth of cash and drugs from a Maple Ridge apartment.

Tip interrupts dial-a-dope operation

Dealer may have Filipino gang connections

by Monisha Martins
staff reporter

An anonymous tip and police surveillance led to a bust of a busy dial-a-dope line that had been operating in downtown Maple Ridge for months.

RCMP seized cash and illegal drugs worth more than \$30,000 from an apartment at 22858 Lougheed Highway.

The investigation was sparked by a tip to CrimeStoppers last May that identified a young Asian man as someone who was delivering drugs to a house on River Road.

Police checked the licence plate number provided and found it registered to a 21-year-old man who been in contact with police 22 times since 2009 and "had associations" with the Rez Back Punioz gang.

A search warrant application says the Filipino gang consists of young men in their late teens and early 20s.

In January, police began tailing a green Nissan Pathfinder that was linked to the crew.

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THSS, different by design

Secondary school celebrates 20 years

by Robert Mangelsdorf
staff reporter

You could be forgiven for mistaking the wide hallways and large open spaces of Thomas Haney Secondary School for a university campus. Even as the Maple Ridge school celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, it's still evident upon entering that it was designed from the ground up to be different. And it remains that way.

"This is not your typical high school," says principal Sean Nosek.

Twenty years ago, the school helped pioneer a new teaching model, one that offers fewer structured classes and more free time, where students learn at their own pace, and have more of a say in what they are learning.

"Schools haven't changed much in 50 years," says Nosek, who started out as a teacher at Thomas Haney 17 years ago. "But the world we're preparing students for is very different."

The self-paced model at Thomas Haney was designed to better



Colleen Flanagan/THE NEWS

Kelsie Exley (left) and Emma Murphy, during their Grade 8 math class at THSS.

foster creative problem-solving, time-management, and life-long learning.

Twenty years on, the model is as successful as ever.

The most obvious difference about Thomas Haney's self-paced model is that students don't attend classes like traditional schools.

While students start out at the school in Grade 8 under a fairly traditional school model, with five classes a day, in Grade 9 they are given more freedom, with fewer required classes to attend, and more discretionary time to complete their own work.

By Grade 12, much of a student's schedule is wide open.

"I love it," Grade 12 student Lisa Szostek, 16, said of the school's self-paced model.

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'As if they saw future coming'

THSS from front

"I'm in the accelerated program, so I was able to power ahead through my courses, and I'm going to be graduating early."

At the same time, Szostek says she was able to devote more of her time to studying courses that gave her difficulty, like Spanish.

"At its heart, it is designed to be a flexible, nimble system, that puts students at the centre of their learning," Nosek says of the school. "Students can spend an entire day working on a project, if they choose."

The open concept towards learning is mirrored in the building's architectural design. The building was designed with wide, open learning areas, community space, and wired so laptops could be used by all teachers and students.

"Hardly anyone had heard of the Internet 20 years ago," says Nosek. "It's as if they saw the future coming."

Students can study in one of the school's three subject-specific "Great Halls"—large study areas with teachers on hand to help students with math, English and science. Students work at their own pace and must fulfill a series of assignments and learning outcomes to pass a course.

"You don't get stuck with a teacher like in



Thomas Haney secondary principal Sean Nosek talks to students working in a Great Hall.

a regular school," says Grade 12 student Joyce Chong. "There's lots of one-on-one, and if there is a teacher you don't like, you can just ask one of the other teachers who are around."

But with freedom comes accountability, and students at Thomas Haney aren't merely left to their own devices.

Every morning students meet with their teacher advisor, who stays with the students from Grade 8 to graduation. A student and their teacher advisor will work together to devise a study

plan for that day, and the advisor will make sure the student sticks to it.

"The teacher advisor role was one of the key pillars to the school," says Mike Suddaby.

He was the school district's assistant superintendent when the school opened, and was one many administrators, teachers, and staff responsible for bringing Thomas Haney to fruition.

The advisor aspect of the school has proven to be so successful, the district has since adopted the practice at all of its

secondary schools.

"My TA is like a second mom," says Grade 12 student Perveen Sivia. "She's always there for me, she's one of the most amazing people I've ever met."

Because the school mixes age groups in home room and in the Great Halls, there is more interaction between older and younger students.

"You can tell a Thomas Haney student by how they carry themselves," says Nosek. "They're more comfortable talking to adults."

The inspiration for

Thomas Haney's innovative learning model came from Bishop Carroll High School, a Catholic high school in Calgary. The school was one of the first in Canada to feature a self-paced learning model, and educators in the district were keen to see if the model could be successful here.

"We were lucky to have staff in the district, and a board of trustees, who were willing to try something different," Suddaby says.

Anyone who has ever had children will tell you the self-paced model

makes sense, he says.

"Kids don't develop at the same time. They don't learn to talk at the time, they don't learn to walk at the same," says Suddaby. "So why do we think they will suddenly conform at 13 years old to a set schedule of development?"

Initially, the model was met with no small amount of skepticism from parents. However, the school's success over the past 20 years has helped change minds.

Provincial exam scores have been consistently above provincial and district averages. This past school year, Thomas Haney had the highest marks of any school in the district on three of the five required provincial exams, according to Nosek.

"That tells me we're doing something right," he says. "Parents see that. And I think the parents have caught up with what we're doing."

Educators from across the country and from as far away as Australia routinely visit the school to see how the Thomas Haney model can be successfully applied elsewhere.

However, the self-paced learning model isn't for everyone, Suddaby notes, and some schools that have tried to adopt a similar style have failed.

"There was a school in Duncan that tried to do something similar, but they eventually switched back," he says. "The problem there was that the school was the only

one in town."

One of the major reasons for Thomas Haney's success has been the fact the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows School District has open catchments for high schools.

"If students want a more traditional learning environment, they can go to Maple Ridge secondary, Garibaldi, or Samuel Robertson, all close by," Suddaby said.

Thomas Haney was also developed in partnership with Douglas College, which initially ran first- and second-year post-secondary courses out of the building. That enabled high school to graduate with a head start in university or college.

However, Douglas College's presence in the school dwindled after the opening of the David Lam Campus in Coquitlam in the mid-1990s. Post-secondary classes were still offered by the school district-owned Ridge Meadows College. But beginning in 2010, the college has operated out of Riverside Centre.

Thomas Haney's self-paced model is still evolving. In recent years, the school has added more structured classes to the younger grades to help ease students' transition.

Both Nosek and Suddaby agree, though, as to the secret of the school's success over the past 20 years.

"It's the teachers, the staff, and the parents," says Suddaby. "They believed in the model, and they made it happen."

Maple Ridge father demands end to teacher job action

Alan Richards starts Facebook group 'Where's my Kid's Report Card'

by Robert Mangelsdorf
staff reporter

Maple Ridge father Alan Richards wants teachers to end their job action and he's taken to the Internet to tell them so.

Richards has started a Facebook group called "Where is my Kid's Report Card?," and is calling on the B.C. teachers' union to accept the provincial government's zero-net mandate of freezing public sector wages and end their job action, which includes not writing report cards and limiting extracurricular activities.

Richards says he wants the B.C. Teachers' Federation to stop using kids as "pawns" in

their contract dispute.

"This isn't an attack on teachers, it's about a policy decision by the B.C. Teachers' Federation," Richards said. "I understand they are trying to negotiate [with the provincial government], but leave my kids alone."

Because of the ongoing job action which started in September, Richards, who has a child in high school and one in elementary, says he has struggled to find out how his children are progressing in school. While some teachers have made themselves available, others have not.

"It's difficult to coordinate with five, six, or seven different teachers, especially for two working parents" he said. "Not all teachers are responding to parent requests."

Richards said he felt a lack of control over what was happening to his kids, so he decided to take to Facebook and create a group where like-minded parents could voice

their concerns. After a week of existence, the group has close to 100 members.

"Parents are frustrated, and they're afraid to speak out, [thinking] it will get taken out on their kids," said Richards. "But it's our responsibility, as parents, to get involved and make ourselves heard."

He thinks many teachers are caught in the middle as well, and aren't fans of the ongoing job action.

"I get the feeling that many just don't agree with it, but they don't want to speak out because they are afraid of retribution," Richards said.

Close to 90 per cent of the BCTF's 41,000-strong membership voted in favour of job action in June, with close to 70 per cent voter turnout.

The B.C. Teachers' Federation announced salary demands last week amounting to a 15 per cent increase over three years, at an

additional cost of \$300 million over the span of the contract.

Provincial education minister George Abbott dismissed the demand as "absurd."

"I have to agree with [Education Minister George Abbott], that [teachers' wage demands] are not realistic given the current economic climate," said Richards. "When the government had money, they doled it out. But that's not the case right now, so to me, it's not logical."

In 2006, B.C. teachers signed a five-year contract with a 16 per cent increase in wage and benefits, as well as a \$4,000 signing bonus.

"It looks to me like the government, and I can't believe I'm saying this, but they're being quite reasonable," Richards said.

He is also considering starting an online petition to urge teachers to end their job action.

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