

SEPTEMBER 2025

SOUTHERN OKANAGAN SECONDARY SCHOOL



HOME OF THE HORNETS

PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE

Welcome to a new school year at Southern Okanagan Secondary School! I am pleased to introduce the newest members of our SOSS staff: Jared Breneman – Counsellor; Mercedes Ducharme – Culinary and English; Sonya Jensen – Okanagan Language; Jason Larsen – English, Learner Support, and Psychology; and Chelsea Wilson – Indigenous Advocate. We are fortunate to have them join us.

It is an honour to serve as interim principal following the retirement of Tracy Harrington. I will keep our community informed as the process to permanently fill this position unfolds. In the meantime, I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting students and immersing myself in the vibrant culture of SOSS. For student pick up and drop off, we ask for your cooperation in not accessing the bus lanes at the front of the school or blocking the bus yard at the back of the school.

A special thank-you goes to LINK Crew, led by Mrs. Podmorow, for helping our Grade 8 students feel welcome through orientation activities that ease their transition into high school life.

Next week, we look forward to the Welcome Back BBQ on Wednesday, September 17th, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. in the outdoor courtyard. Hosted by our dedicated Parent Advisory Council, this annual event is a wonderful way to connect as a school community. All proceeds will support PAC initiatives—please join us!

Our fall athletics program is off to a strong start thanks to the leadership of Athletic Director, Mr. Podmorow. This season we are excited to cheer on teams in field hockey, soccer, and volleyball.

The cafeteria is also open, offering a variety of delicious options under the culinary guidance of Ms. Ducharme. The monthly menu is available on our school website. Cafeteria punch cards are available in the office and online for \$60.00. Debit purchases are also available for a minimum of \$4.00.

Finally, a warm welcome to all of our new families. I know you will find SOSS to be an energetic and supportive school, full of spirit and opportunities for every student to get involved. I look forward to an exciting and successful year ahead.

Sincerely,

Bev Young, Principal

IMPORTANT DATES

SEPTEMBER 17	WELCOME BACK BBQ, 5 PM-7PM
SEPTEMBER 24	EARLY DISMISSAL @ 11:55AM, INQUIRY DAY
SEPTEMBER 25	TERRY FOX RUN AND BBQ
SEPTEMBER 30	NATIONAL DAY OF RECONCILIATION, NO SCHOOL
OCTOBER 1	EUROPE TRIP PARENT MEETING, 5PM LIBRARY



SOSS TRIP TO FRANCE & ITALY

For students in grades 9, 10 and 11 this year!

ALL INCLUDED
\$6157
PER PERSON

Paris - Cote d'Azur - Monaco - Eze - Nice
Florence - Rome - Pompeii

PACKAGE INCLUDES:

- 11 Days and 9 Nights Tour
- Full European Breakfast Daily
- Dinner Daily
- Local Transportation
- Professional Tour Guide & Tips
- Airfare from Kelowna



DEPARTURE: 16 MARCH 2026

TRIP ITINERARY: WWW.EXPLORICA/STOPA-6189

Contact us: Mrs. Goncalves  rgoncalv@sd53.bc.ca  250-488-7195
Mrs. Stopa  hstopa@sd53.bc.ca  250-498-7691

HORNETS TAKE EUROPE 2026

We are 186 days away from our epic adventure to Europe! There are still 5 spots available for our students to join us. The opportunity to see France and Italy over Spring Break is one you won't want to miss. The trip is scheduled for March 16-26 and includes Paris, Cote d'Azur, Monaco and Eze in France before we travel by fast train to Florence, Rome and Pompeii in Italy! A very busy and incredibly memorable trip.

For more information please contact Mrs. Goncalves at rgoncalv@sd53.bc.ca or Mrs. Stopa at hstopa@sd53.bc.ca or you can check out this link.

The Hornets X-Country team is back in action! Athletes have been training hard in preparation for their first race at Campbell Mountain in Penticton on September 24th. Following an incredibly successful season last year, the team is aiming to continue their streak of back-to-back trips to the Provincial Championships in Nanaimo on November 1st.

Training sessions run Monday to Thursday from 3:00 – 4:30 pm. If your athlete is interested in joining the team, please contact Mr. Hall, Mr. Adam, or Mr. Breneman for more information.



ART

The SOSS Art Club is up and running after school on Mondays from 2:45-4:15 in the art room. All students are welcome to attend. Students don't need to be able to come to every Monday in order to be able to come to the Art Club; just come when you are able to! Opportunities for group projects, community involvement, art shows and individual pursuits.

SAGA (the Sexuality and Gender Alliance) club at SOSS had their first meeting on the 5th. Meetings are on Fridays at lunch in the art room. All LGBTQ2S+ students and allies are welcome to attend. Come help us plan fun events and support diversity at SOSS. A fun, welcoming, and friendly environment to eat your lunch and meet like-minded peers.

This year's Penti-Con will be happening on October 18-19 at the convention center in Penticton. Lots of SOSS students' artwork will be on display. Students who have artwork in the show will get into the event for free and will be given a ticket to get one friend or family member in for a discounted price so dust off those costumes and join us for a fun-filled weekend!

This Friday night, September 12th there will be an all ages music show at the Elks Hall starting at 6:30pm featuring SOSS's own 20 Willow and the Mudrats joined by SOSS alumni musicians in Bucket. Tickets are only \$10. Come out and support these up and coming local youth musicians.

SKATEBOARD CLUB

Skateboard Club is back. We will travel to South Okanagan area skateparks after school each Monday until November 3rd.

Skaters must bring their own helmet and skateboard (or scooter). Permission forms are available outside room 206. See Mr. McKinnon for details. Beginners are always welcome!

PARENT VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO BAKE



**A DOZEN CUPCAKES
FOR OUR
BACK TO SCHOOL BBQ
SEPTEMBER 17
SOSSPAC53@GMAIL.COM**



Welcome Back
SOSS BBQ
By **DONATION**

Recommended \$5 min

Wed, September 17

5-7pm



Proceeds going
towards the
SOSS PAC
Scholarship Fund!



Live Music - Hot Dogs - Drinks



Why Student Attendance Matters



Okanagan
Similkameen
SD53

In the Okanagan Similkameen School District, we all share the responsibility - educators, families, and community members - to help every student not only succeed but thrive. A key part of that success is **being at school every day.**

When students miss school they:

- Miss valuable learning that cannot be replaced with homework
- Fall behind in reading, especially by Grade 3
- Struggle more in later grades
- Are less likely to graduate from high school
- Are less engaged in school. Group work, hands-on activities, and daily social experiences can't be recreated.

Teachers must adjust plans and spend time helping absent students catch up, which impacts the whole class. Every missed day affects learning.

What is Chronic Absence?

- Missing **20% of the school year** (about 3-4 days per month)
- Includes **excused absences, unexcused absences, late arrivals, early pick-ups, and suspensions**

What Parents Can Do

You play a key role in building strong attendance habits. Here's how you can help:

- **Communicate** with the school about any lateness, early pick-ups, or absences
- **Schedule appointments** after school or on non-school days
- **Plan vacations** during school breaks
- **Have a backup plan** for getting your child to school if something unexpected happens
- **Build healthy routines:**
 - Create regular bedtimes to ensure enough sleep. Cell phone & electronic usage should end before bedtime.
 - Have clothes & backpacks ready the night before.
- **Address anxiety early**—if your child is worried about school, talk to their teacher or school counsellor

SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S SUCCESS

- Students are expected to **arrive on time and stay for the entire school day**
- If your child is absent, you **must notify the school office**
- Review school calendars as days off & breaks are posted on each school's website

🌟 **Every Day Matters – Together, we can help all students learn, grow, and succeed!** 🌟



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SD53

Tel 250-498-3481 Fax 250-498-4070
Box 1770, 6161 Okanagan Street, Oliver, BC, Canada V0H 1T0
sd53.bc.ca

School Name: Southern Okanagan Secondary School
Administrator Contact: Ms. Bev Young byoung@sd53.bc.ca
Date: September 2, 2025

Dear Parents or Guardians:

The Okanagan Similkameen School District is committed to providing students with innovative tools that enhance learning and prepare them for the future. As part of this effort, we plan to introduce integrating **Microsoft Copilot Chat**, an AI-powered educational assistant, into classroom activities to support student learning, creativity, and productivity for all students 13 years and older. Copilot Chat helps students by answering questions, assisting with writing, summarizing information, and more.

To ensure transparency, we are notifying you of this tool's use and providing you the opportunity to opt your child out if you prefer.

Microsoft Copilot Chat is a secure, District managed AI assistant that operates within Microsoft 365 Education environments. It is designed to:

- Help students with writing, research, and problem-solving.
- Encourage independent learning and critical thinking.
- Provide personalized support while maintaining student privacy.

All interactions are monitored and managed by the District's IT administrators to ensure safety and compliance with educational standards. No personal data is collected or shared outside the school's Microsoft 365 environment and students are guided on responsible and ethical use of AI tools.

If you do not want your child to use Microsoft Copilot Chat, please complete and return the form below by September 29, 2025.

If we do not receive a response, we will assume your consent for your child to use this educational tool.

Sincerely,
Bev Young
Principal
Southern Okanagan Secondary School
byoung@sd53.bc.ca





Guiding Principles for AI Use in SD53

Introduction

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly integrated into education, the Okanagan Similkameen School District is committed to ensuring that its use aligns with our core values: inclusivity, curiosity, relationships, well-being, truth & reconciliation, and adaptability. These guiding principles provide a framework for the responsible and ethical use of AI by students and staff. They will be reviewed and updated as needed in an evolving educational landscape.

1. Inclusivity

AI tools must be accessible, equitable, and age appropriate for all learners and staff. The district commits to embracing AI to enhance access to information and equity in education, providing safe environments that honor and reflect our diversity.

2. Curiosity

AI tools can enrich critical and creative thinking and problem-solving while also promoting digital literacy and responsible usage. The district encourages students and staff to explore AI to pursue innovation through inquiry and curiosity.

3. Relationships

Education is fundamentally about human connection. AI should enhance—not replace—meaningful relationships between students, staff, and the community. AI tools should be used as a complement to human processes, collaboration, and ethical decision-making.

4. Well-Being

Fostering well-being is a cornerstone of the Okanagan Similkameen School District's strategic plan. We are committed to using AI to enhance learning and promote the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of students and staff. AI should help make education more engaging, inclusive, and supportive. All AI use must respect user safety, privacy, and data protection, and align with ethical standards and legal requirements.

5. Truth & Reconciliation

The district's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation recognizes the importance of respecting cultural diversity. This encourages the consideration of Indigenous perspectives in AI applications while avoiding AI tools that perpetuate colonial biases and appropriation. We commit to a culturally responsive approach that integrates diverse perspectives in AI use and implementation.

6. Adaptability

The district commits to continuous learning, ethical reflection, and regular review of AI tools to ensure they align with best practices and our district's values. AI amplifies, but does not replace, traditional instruction, reporting, and teacher expertise. District policies and practices must be flexible and responsive.

Opt-Out Form

Student Name:

Grade:

Parent/Guardian Name: _

Signature:

Date: _

☐ *I do not give permission for my child to use Microsoft Copilot Chat in the classroom.*

Please return this form to Ms. Bev Young by September 29, 2025.