



SEPTEMBER 2026

SPARKS NOTES

Similkameen Elementary Secondary Monthly Bulletin

Principal's Message:

Dear SESS Families,

Welcome to the 2026–27 school year! It has been wonderful to have our students back in the building, and we are looking forward to a positive and memorable year. We are grateful for the support of our parents, caregivers, and community and extend a special welcome to families who are new to SESS.

We are pleased to welcome several new staff members: Michelle White (Grade 7), Spencer Toneatto (English/French), Brad Hillson (High School Indigenous Advocate), Lindsay Fotheringham (Leadership, CLE/CLC and Work Experience), and Sarah Kohler (EA). We are excited to have you join our team!

Our cafeteria will open next week, with students preparing delicious food under the guidance of Mr. Adolf—AKA Chef. Hot lunches will cost up to \$5, and funds can be added to student accounts through the Student Quick Pay link on our website.

Our Absence Reporting System will also continue this year. If your high school student misses a class and we have not been notified, the system will contact you by phone and email. It will not call for students who are late unless they miss most of the class and are marked absent. Please notify the office of any changes to your contact information and let us know whenever your student will be absent.

Please take a few minutes to read our Guidelines for Positive Communication. We all share the same goal: helping our students thrive. Keeping that goal at the centre of our conversations helps us work together effectively.

We look forward to partnering with our SESS families for an exciting year of learning and growth.

Go SPARKS!
Stacey Smith

Principal: S. Smith

ssmith@sd53.bc.ca

Vice Principal: K. Anderson

kanderso@sd53.bc.ca

School Phone: (250) 499-2727

Website: www.sess.sd53.bc.ca

Important Dates:

September

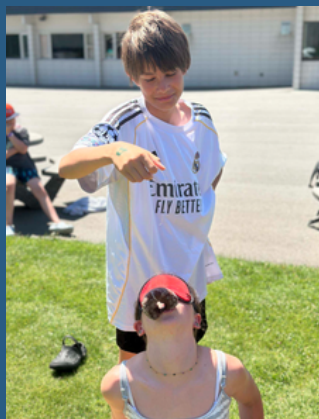
- 8 First Day of School
- 17 Back to School BBQ
- 21 School Photos
- 23 Inquiry Day (12:00 Dismissal)
- 28 Terry Fox Run
- 29 Orange Shirt Day @ SESS
- 30 Nat'l Truth & Reconciliation Day - School Closed

October

- 2 District Cross Country Run
- 5-8 Kokanee Glacier Cabin Hike
- 12 Thanksgiving - School Closed
- 21 Family Conferences (half day)
- 22 Photo Retakes (half day)
- 23 Non-Instructional Day
- 28 Inquiry Day (12:00 Dismissal)
- 31 Hallowe'en



Sports Day Donut Eating Contest!



School Fees

School Fees can be paid by cash, cheque or online (please make any cheques payable to Similkameen Elementary Secondary).

Grades 5-7 - \$40

This activity fee which helps with the costs of activities such as ice skating and swimming. The fees also help with costs like student planners and locks.

Grade 8 & any secondary students who are new to the school - \$60 total

\$40 and \$20 for a refundable textbook deposit.

Grade 9-11- \$40



Grade 12- \$200 total

\$40 school activity fee and a \$160 Grad Fee.



STARFISH PACK



The purpose of the Backpack Starfish Program is to help families in need. When it comes to the weekend, the Starfish Pack was designed to help. Starfish provides backpacks with 2 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 2 dinners, and snacks for hungry students each weekend of the school year. Visit <https://starfishpack.com> for more information. See the office to sign up.



Welcome to New Staff

We have a number of new staff members at SESS this year. We would like to give a warm welcome to the following staff members:

Ms. M. King - Grade 7 Teacher

Ms. S. Kohler - Education Assistant

Ms. L Fotheringham - Leadership/
CLC/CLE/Work Experience

Mr. S. Toneatto - English/French Teacher

Mr. B. Hillson - Sec. Indigenous Advocate



Peanut Free & Pet Free Space

Due to the fact that SESS is a space where both students and staff with allergies come to learn and work, it is imperative that we keep this space safe. Therefore, we ask that visitors and students avoid bringing pets and peanuts onto the premises whenever possible.



Back to School BBQ

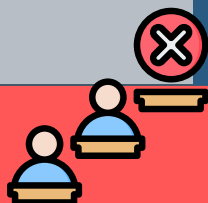
September 17
5:00- 7:00

Grade 5 Parent Meeting @5:30
Grade 8 Parent Meeting @ 6:00
Grad Meeting @ 6:30

See you there!

Elementary House Assembly

Monday, September 28 will be our first House Assembly. Returning students and staff will welcome our new Sparks into one of our four houses! Our upcoming Terry Fox Run will be our first event to earn House points.



Coaches needed!



If you are interested in volunteering some of your time to coach a sports team please contact our athletic director James Brown at jbrown@sd53.bc.ca. All community coaches must complete a criminal record check.



Office Staff and Office Hours

We are so fortunate to have a wonderful office team as the front line of communication for our school. Ms. Julie Rooney is our head secretary who is responsible for student records, reception, and attendance. We are waiting to hire and welcome our Accounting Clerk who will be responsible for finances. Thank you for your patience as we look for the just the right person to join our team. Our office hours are 8:00-3:00 Monday to Friday. If you child is going to be absent, please notify the office at 250-499-2727 so we know that they are safe.

Attendance Matters

Regular attendance is the key to your child's success at school. Chronic absences make it difficult for students to learn the necessary skills to be successful, and they also put a lot of pressure on staff to support students who miss a significant amount of in-class learning. This year, as always, we are focusing on attendance, and our priority will be communicating with families about the importance of students consistently showing up each day. Our automated callout system is used to notify secondary parents each evening if a student has an unexcused absence. A reminder that if your child misses school due to illness or a family commitment, then a parent or guardian must contact the school to excuse the absence.



National Truth and Reconciliation Day

September 30th is the National Day of Remembrance to recognize the lasting impact of the Indian Residential School System in Canada. Our goal is to continue to educate our school community about the impact that this system had, and continues to have, on Indigenous communities, as well as to recognize our responsibility as Canadians to engage in acts of reconciliation. On September 29th all students and staff are encouraged to wear orange. SESS will have activities on the 29th in honour of The National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. Learn more about the purpose of [Orange Shirt Day](#) [here](#).

HONOURING EXPERIENCES. CELEBRATING RESILIENCE.

every child matters

Staff Contacts

Parents and guardians can contact any teacher by emailing them directly. All staff email information is available on our [school website](#). Parents can also call the school at 250-499-2727.

Bus Registration

A reminder that all students who take the bus must register this year. Here is the [link to the registration form](#) as well as information about bus routes and times.



SESS News!

The best way to access news and information about SESS is through our school website at sess.sd53.bc.ca which is continually updated. On the website you will find news items as well as our calendar of events. We also have links to various resources for parents and students and other practical information such as our timetable, code of conduct, bus routes and schedules.

SESS also has various social media accounts which we encourage you to check out!

Facebook: [@SimilkameenSchool](#)

Instagram: [@similkameensparks](#)



Playground and Field

We are getting a new playground on our Elementary end. It is expected by the end of October. We are excited!

A huge ask from us - please clean up after your dogs when using the fields. It's really important for us to keep our fields clean and safe for our students. Thank you!





Parent Portal

Please log in to your Parent Portal and double check your child's address and emergency contact information. If any changes need to be made, please email sessoffice@sd53.bc.ca. In the portal, you'll also be able to see your child's attendance, report cards, and assignments (high school only). Here is the [link to the login page](#).



Online Payment System

Our online payment system, Student Quick Pay, is ready to go! You are able to add money to your child's lunch account, pay for student fees and field trips, all from the comfort of your own home! Please click this [link for instructions on how to set up your account](#) and this [link](#) for Meal Manage, where you can manage your child's lunch money. If you have any questions or difficulties, please email sessoffice@sd53.bc.ca

SESS Code of Conduct

Our [SESS Code of Conduct](#) is available for students and parents on our school website.

Extra-Curricular Activities

The following activities will be starting up in September and October :

- Volleyball (Gr. 8, Junior, Senior)
- Boys Soccer (Gr. 8-12)
- Cross-Country (Gr. 8-12)
- Chess Club (lunch)
- Elem Cross- Country
- Elem Soccer (after Cross-Country)



Declaration of Indigenous Ancestry

If your child has First Nations, Metis, or Inuit heritage, they qualify for additional services through the Ministry of Education. The school district provides additional academic and cultural support for these students. Parents/guardians only need to self-identify to qualify for this support, and status is not a requirement. If your child has Indigenous ancestry and you have not previously contacted the school, please contact our school and we will provide the required forms to complete.



GRAD 2027

Welcome to the graduating class of 2027! We will start the year with an important Grad meeting for parents on September 17th at 6:30. Grads are also encouraged to attend with their care givers. We will discuss fun activities that will be held for the grads throughout the year as well as important grad responsibilities such as academic focus, graduation requirements, post secondary applications, and the process for completing the required Career Life Connections course. We are looking forward to a great year with our grads!



Outdoor Club Trip



Outdoor Ed is planning for a fun adventure. Stay tuned for more information coming soon! A parent meeting with more details will be held on September 17 during the back to school BBQ in room 21 (Mr. Vikner's classroom) at 5:15 pm.



Copilot A.I.

We will be sending home a permission form with you students in grades 8-12 for Copilot A.I. - a closed AI tool. You should return the form to the school ONLY if you do not wish your child to use A.I.



BREAKFAST CLUB

This year we will again have a free breakfast available every morning for all students. The club is open at 8:10 in the cafeteria and provides a variety of options for students to have a great meal to start their day. Thank you in advance to the students, staff, and community volunteers who make this essential service possible at SESS!





Student Drop-Off @ Front of School

Parents, when dropping off your student, please do not drop at the stop sign directly in front of SESS. You are welcome to pull over to the side of the road (before the stop sign) or preferably use one of the parking spaces or the turnaround in front of the school on 2nd Ave. Dropping students off AT the stop sign is a safety hazard and also causes traffic congestion in the morning when we have a lot of students being dropped off. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation!



Elementary Expectations

A few reminders of key expectations for elementary students (grades 5-7):

- Cell phones are not permitted between 8:30 am and 2:30 pm. Students should leave their phones in their lockers or not bring them to school at all. Students who need to contact a parent will always be permitted to use the office phone. Parents can also contact students through the office and we will relay the message.
- Elementary students are not permitted to leave school property at any time unless they are accompanied by a staff member.
- Elementary morning supervision starts at 8:15 am. Please do not drop off your child or allow them to come to school before this time as we will be unable to provide supervision.



SESS PAC

Why Join Pac?

It's an opportunity to contribute to your child's education.

Many school activities and events would not take place without the support of the PAC.

Stay tuned for meeting dates.

Guidelines for Positive Communication



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

In the Okanagan Similkameen School District, we want schools to be safe, supportive, and welcoming places for students to learn and for staff to work. A key part of creating this environment is how we communicate and work together as a community.

We deeply value the partnership between home and school and ask for your support in the following areas:

Communication

- Please follow our process when concerns arise: Begin by making an appointment to speak with your child's teacher, and if more follow-up is needed, contact the school administration. Additional information can be found in Board Policy [F-10 Dispute Resolution Policy](#)
- Use respectful language in all communication, whether in person, on the phone, or through email.
- Please understand that responses may not always be immediate. Staff will do their best to communicate with you as soon as possible.
- Clarify your child's perspective with staff to better understand the full picture, and work toward calm, reasonable solutions.
- Avoid using social media to air complaints. It does not resolve concerns and often makes situations harder for everyone involved.

Partnership

- Support your child's regular attendance at school and reach out if you need help with this.
- Work with staff to find solutions when issues come up.
- Review and discuss the Student Code of Conduct with your child so they understand expectations.

Conduct

- When visiting the school, please remain calm and respectful. Swearing, inappropriate language, threats, or verbal abuse are not acceptable.

School Culture

- Please join us in treating all members of our school community with dignity and respect. This includes respecting diversity in identity, race, culture, beliefs, family status, abilities, gender, and age, as outlined by the BC Human Rights Code.

Together, we can build a school environment where all students and adults feel safe, respected, and supported in their learning. Thank you for your partnership in this important work.

Warm regards,

Marcus Toneatto
Superintendent of Schools
Okanagan Similkameen School District No. 53



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
- Absences also affect classmates and teachers. 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!** 🌟

SEPTEMBER

Events



SEPT

8



8:30 - 11:15

First Day of School

SEPT

17



5:00 - 7:00

Welcome Back BBQ

SEPT

21



Picture Day

SEPT

21



Elementary Assembly

SEPT

28



Terry Fox Run

SEPT

29



Orange Shirt Day

SEPT

30



NO SCHOOL

*National Day for Truth
& Reconciliation*

Looking Ahead...

OCT

23

NO SCHOOL

*Professional
Development Day*



2026/2027 SCHOOL CALENDAR

September 2026

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

October 2026

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

November 2026

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

December 2026

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

January 2027

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

February 2027

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28						

March 2027

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

April 2027

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

May 2027

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

June 2027

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

September 7	Labour Day
September 8	Schools Open
September 30	National Day for Truth & Reconciliation
October 12	Thanksgiving Day
November 11	Remembrance Day
December 21	Christmas Break Begins
January 4	Schools Re-Open
January 28-29 & Feb 1	Secondary Exam Days
February 2	Second Semester Begins
February 15	Family Day
March 15	Spring Break Begins
March 26	Good Friday
March 29	Easter Monday
March 30	Schools Re-Open
May 24	Victoria Day
June 24, 25 & 28	Secondary Exam Days
June 29	Last Day of Classes
June 30	Administrative Day (School Closed for Students)

Number of Days in Session 190

Number of Days of Instruction 183

DISTRICT NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DAYS

October 23 – Professional Development Day
February 12 – Professional Development Day
March 22 to 25 - Connected to Spring Break

EARLY DISMISSAL DATES

Schools will notify parents of early dismissal times

Also available on our website: <http://www.sd53.bc.ca/>

Cawston/Keremeos: October 21 & 22 / April 8 & 9

Osoyoos: October 21 & 22 / April 8 & 9

Oliver/OK Falls: October 21 & 22 / April 8 & 9

District wide early dismissal days for Inquiry Time are indicated on calendar with this symbol { }

Family Conferences

October 21: CPS, OKF, OES, OSE, OSS, SESS, SOSS, TEN

April 8: CPS, OKF, OES, OSE, OSS, SESS, SOSS, TEN

- Stat/School Holidays
 Non-Instructional Days
 Secondary Exam Days
 Year End Administration

SESS Travel Club

Bottle Drive



Collection Date:

**Saturday
September 19,
2026**

Drop-off Location:

SESS Parking Lot

Pickup available. For more
information, please contact
Kayla Bumstead



**250 499 2727 OR
KBUMSTE@SD53.BC.CA**



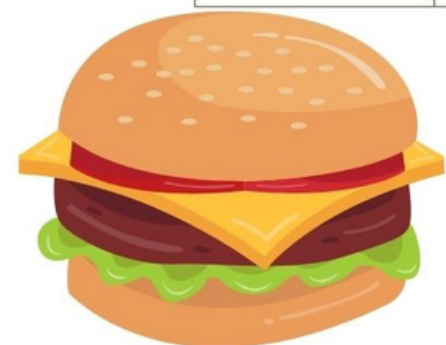
Thank you for supporting us
with your donation!

SEPTEMBER

2026



	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
14 Club Sandwich	15 Tacos	16 Haburgers	17 Pizza	18 Chef Special
21 Chicken Pasta Salad	22 Quesadillas	23 Early Dismissal	24 Beef Stroganoff	25 Chef Special
28 Deli Subs	29 Chicken dinner	30 No School	1 Pizza	2 Chef Special
5 Bacon Ranch Wraps	6 Perogie Piles	7 Chicken Burgers	8 Mac n' Cheese	9 Chef Special



Cafeteria

