

MECCS

A newsletter for Mother Earth's Children's Charter School to share its successful traditional and innovative programming.

Mother Earth's Children's Charter School

Box 42, Site 2, RR 1

Warburg, AB T0C 2T0

780-702-7531 school office

780-232-4481 family liaison

Principal Erin Danforth - edanforth@meccs.org

Family Liaison Janet House - jhouse@meccs.org

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Learning Biathlon Skills

One of our long-standing partnerships is with Spirit North. Spirit North Founder and CEO Beckie Scott is an Olympic gold and silver medalist in cross-country skiing, an Officer of the Order of Canada and a member of the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame.

Spirit North is a national organization that uses land-based activities to improve the health and well-being of Indigenous youth through the transformative power of sport and play. It works in partnership with schools to help students make meaningful connections to the land and improve physical and mental health.

Biathlon is one of the most popular winter sports in Europe, and it continues to grow in popularity across North America. Biathlon is a winter sport that combines cross-country skiing and rifle shooting. It is treated as a race, with contestants skiing through a cross-country trail whose distance is divided into shooting rounds.

Lazura Roan practising biathlon skills in the MECCS gymnasium.





The shooting rounds are not timed, but missed shots result in extra distance or time being added to the contestant's total.

Shooting rounds are done half in prone position, half standing. For each shooting round, the biathlete must hit five targets or receive a penalty for each missed target. The penalty, which varies according to the competition rules, is either having to ski around a 150-metre penalty loop or having one minute added to the skier's total time.

The biathlete carries a small-bore .22 rifle, which must weigh at least 3.5 kg, excluding ammunition and magazines. The target range shooting distance is 50 metres. There are five circular shooting targets to be hit in each shooting round. The minimum ski length is the height of the skier minus 4 cm. The skier must carry the rifle at all times during the race.

Leah Reid has been our lead instructor from Spirit North for four years and this year introduced our students to a new partner, Biathlon Alberta. Connor Speer, another Spirit North instructor, and Helene Jørgensen, a coach with Biathlon Alberta, recently spent a week introducing our students to biathlon. Helene was an active competitor in Norway until she moved to Edmonton five years ago to become a coach with Biathlon Alberta.

Left, top: Leah Reid, Helene Jørgensen and Connor Speer, our biathlon instructors from Spirit North and Biathlon Alberta.

Left: The laser target.

Left, bottom: Helene explaining how the targets work.



For safety reasons, only Eco Aim laser rifles and mechanical targets are used in schools. It is easy to set up in the gym using a 10-metre distance for the shooting rounds. They are connected to a computer and monitor so the students get immediate feedback on how they did. As the students

Below: Connor coaching Ayasha Bull on how to aim the Eco Aim Laser Rifle.



got better at shooting, Helene adjusted the target size to increase the degree of difficulty.

It looked easy enough, so Superintendent Ed Wittchen and teacher Mark Ehnes joined in the lessons. They quickly discovered it was harder than it looked. Within a few tries, however, they were regularly hitting the targets.

Many of the students became quite adept over the week. By the end, they were regularly hitting five out of five targets. Of course, it is much easier to shoot when you haven't just skied a few kilometres in harsh winter conditions and are trying to control your heavy breathing while still hitting the targets like actual competitors do.

As well, when competitors are outdoors on an actual course, they are wearing their skis, which makes it more difficult to get into the prone shooting position.

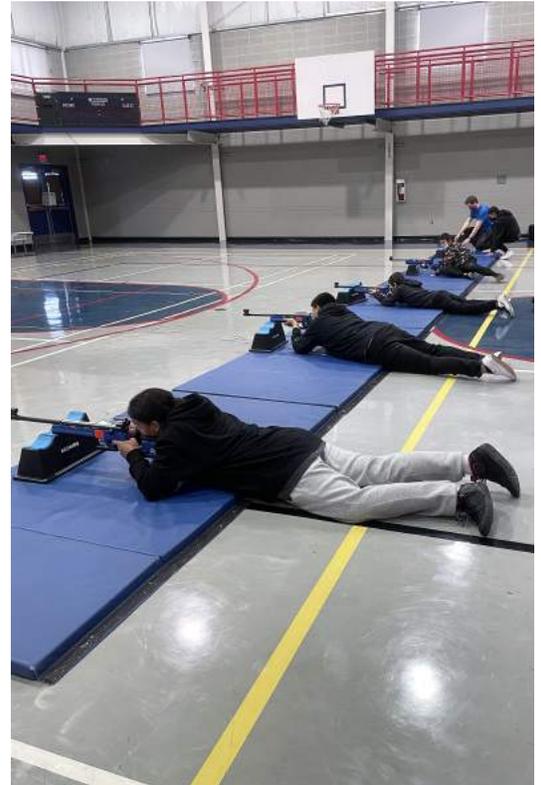
For the purposes of our competition, for every target missed, the students had to run around a set of pylons in the gym before taking their next shot.

We are looking forward to our one week per month sessions with Leah Reid and her colleagues. They will be teaching cross-country skiing skills for the next several visits.



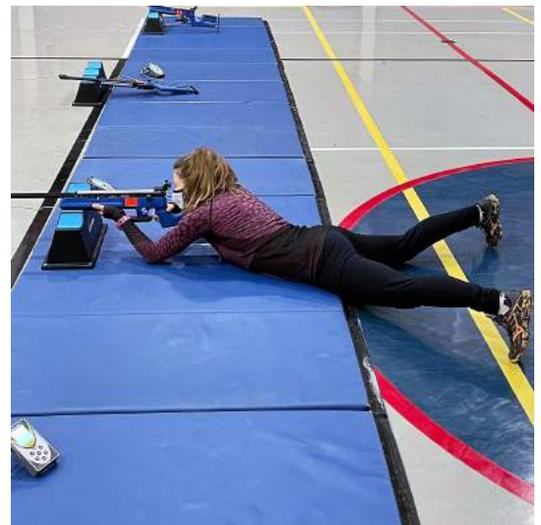
Right, top: Helene coaching teacher Mark Ehnes.

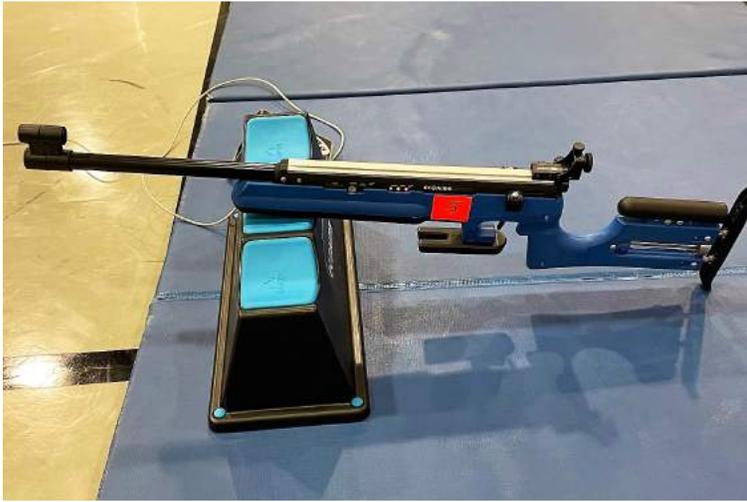
Right: MECCS students demonstrating their skills as they compete in a modified biathlon shooting exercise.



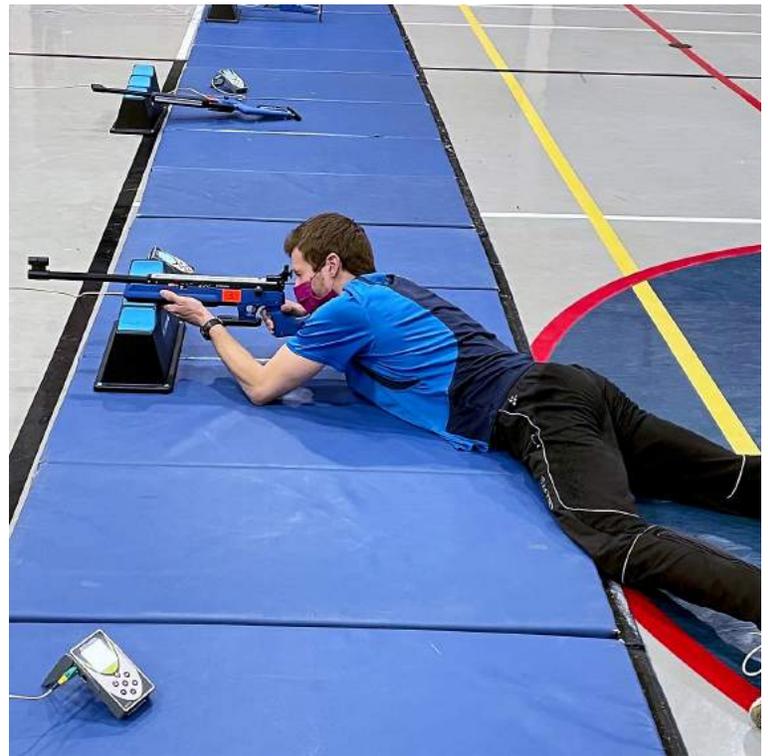
Right, bottom: Leah demonstrating her shooting technique.

Below: Conway Saulteaux practising his shooting skills.





Above: A close look at the Eco Aim Laser Rifle used in our biathlon skills learning sessions.



Right: Spirit North instructor Connor Speer demonstrating his shooting technique.



Developing rifle skills as part of our biathlon learning sessions

Left: Elijah House-Alexis practising his aim.

Below, left: Lazura Roan coaching Tenzin Bird.

Below: Superintendent Ed Wittchen giving the rifle a try.

