

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK
2011-2012**

**CEDAR COMMUNITY SECONDARY
#68 Nanaimo Ladysmith**

Leadership Team

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School Context/Community

Cedar Secondary is a relatively new school located in a rural and semi-rural setting near the south end of Nanaimo on Vancouver Island. The student population is 450. The school population is a melting pot of social classes all housed in our one school. As well, our school serves a part of the Snuneymux^w First Nation community and one of the reserves is just a short walk from the school. As might be typical of any school anywhere, our students and families struggle with issues of family break up, substance abuse, and addictions; but families also engage their students in a wide range of positive school activities in addition to those in the community at large. The staff tends to be young, with a mix of long-term employees as well as high-turnover younger employees, which impacts the sense of staff cohesiveness. Nonetheless, the school is community minded, and everyone tends to know everyone else.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

Do the school-wide Northern Games at Cedar develop and support a sense of belonging to the school community for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and for our school's staff? Do the games enhance student and staff understanding of Aboriginal history and culture, especially when situated in a contemporary context?

The games will be held at Cedar for only the second time this year. In addition, Cedar will be hosting another secondary school in a Northern Games Challenge of the Champions event.

Focus of Inquiry

The focus was three pronged: we wanted to know if our school-wide Aboriginal Northern Games event made enough of an impact on students that they felt a stronger connection to the Cedar community, we wanted to know if participation in the games helped students to learn about Aboriginal culture and stimulated them to want to learn more, and we wanted to know whether the students found enough value in the first games to want them to run a second year.

Links with District Enhancement Agreement

Emotion: How can we enhance Aboriginal students' sense of belonging within schools and their belief that they can be successful in the public education system, while at the same time enhancing the belief of the system that Aboriginal students can be more successful?

Body: How can we enhance ALL students' and ALL adults' understanding of Aboriginal history, perspectives, people and the contemporary context?

Strategies

Our team surveyed the entire school twice, once in January (the first games had happened the previous spring) and again following the 2012 Cedar Northern Games and the Challenge of the Champions against another secondary school, which Cedar hosted. The surveys posed key questions and students had the opportunity to add comments about their evaluations of the games. Staff had the same opportunity. We faced a challenge with evaluation of and participation in our

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first games in March 2012, as senior students staged a walkout to protest government action in the province-teacher job conflict. However, students fully participated in the Challenge, and that successful event seems to have galvanized opinion about the games overall. Responses from students who did not attend or participate were not included and there was a large enough number of these students that we need a strategy for including them next year. Some students clearly did not understand the survey and those surveys were also not included. Finally, the Grade 8's were not involved in the 2011 games, but their responses, where appropriate, were included, as many had heard about the games from siblings. Our Challenge was filmed by Shaw cable and posted on YouTube in mid-June 2012. The video caught the attention of the coordinator for Traditional Sport in the NWT and he has offered his support to our schools for next year's events.

School Findings

	Did you attend or participate in the games?	How would you rate the games? 3, 4, 5 higher ratings; 0,1,2 lower	Did the games make you feel more a part of the Cedar community? 3, 4, 5 higher ratings; 0,1,2 lower	Did you learn something <i>more</i> about Aboriginal culture?	Do you want to learn more about Aboriginal Culture? 3, 4, 5 higher ratings; 0,1,2 lower	Do you want to have the games again next year (next time)?
January 2012	163 YES 170 NO	131 high 24 low	68 high 89 low	80 YES 98 NO	156 high 181 low	181 YES 48 NO
April 2012	210 YES 113 NO	177 high 24 low	123 high 77 low	68 YES 135 NO	80 high 120 low	193 YES 27 NO

AESN Plans for 2012-2013

The purpose of the project for this year was to ascertain whether or not our school-wide event was valuable for the school community, whether it facilitated a sense of belonging, and whether it encouraged respect and knowledge about Aboriginal cultures. Most of the value of our study came not from the numbers, but from the wide ranging and numerous comments we got, especially about why students wanted to have the games again: "It's good for the soul." (Grade 10 student); "Because it's a beautiful bonding experience." (Grade 11); "It helps bring alive Canada's Aboriginal culture." (Grade 11); "It is an exciting event in which we learn and enjoy ourselves." (Grade 11); "Cuz they are fun and I am awesome." (Grade 12 student who had never won any sporting competition before the games); "It's good to keep Aboriginal culture alive." (Grade 12); "A great opportunity for the school to celebrate Aboriginal culture together." (staff); "It's a good school activity." (Grade 9); "I thought they were fun to watch and cheer for our school."; "Because they are fun and exciting to watch!"; "Because it showed school spirit for Cedar."; "I think it brings the school closer together." (Grade 11)

Reflections, Advice

Firstly, we acknowledge that this event is one which the students overwhelmingly wish to see continued on an annual basis. There were several key areas in which we can improve with both the planning and the delivery of the games. Based on comments, our team will make more of an effort to include student council in the planning of the games. This year, due to teacher job action, that was difficult although student leaders were involved in the planning and running of the first games event in 2011. Based on student and staff feedback, our team will plan next year to introduce the history and cultural background to the games in a school-wide setting. This was done the first year when district and school staff visited all the PE classes. This year the introduction was done only for the incoming Grade 8s and some 9s, so many students missed out on the culture and history connection. It was clear from both student and staff comments and the numbers that this is an important component of the games.