

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK
2011-2012**

**KITWANGA ELEMENTARY
#82 Coast Mountains**

Leadership Team

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School Context/Community Involvement

Kitwanga Elementary School is situated on Gitksan territory between the communities of Gitanyow and Gitwangak in Kitwanga Valley in the Northwest of B.C. This year 95% of our 90 students are of Aboriginal ancestry. We strive to improve engagement and achievement levels through increased parental, elder and community involvement, literacy initiatives, and indigenous teachings.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

Will 90% of our students be meeting or exceeding expectations in Social Responsibility by the final term when traditional seasonal Gitksan practices are taught to help all students understand the cultural rhythm of the year in a meaningful way?

Links with District Enhancement Agreement

Our question linked with the school district goals:

- To create positive awareness of First Nations cultures through First Nations Language and Culture.
- To encourage Elders to participate in sharing their traditional and contemporary knowledge, skills, and stories.
- To provide First Nations role models to work with students.

Strategies

For the first few months of the year we did not have a Language and Culture teacher in place. We proposed to use the funds saved to have Elders included as part of the program from Dec. to June. As our school is separated by distance and geography from the two reserve communities we serve, we found we had to look at various ways to involve the Elders and families. The culture teacher worked side-by-side with the Elders planning circle story telling, learning and singing traditional songs, and integrating seasonal activities throughout the winter and spring months.

During the winter it was traditional to plan for Feasts and gatherings by practicing songs, dances and drumming. It was the time through the long winter months to make drums and regalia, to sew, to bead and to carve. Our students at all age levels took part in these projects. The older student made paddles, bentwood boxes, and drums. The younger students made cedar feathers that they painted with designs applied by older students. All students worked with cedar and had opportunities to complete a range of beading projects.

In early spring, to celebrate the oolichan run in the Nass, the students first studied the candle fish and participated in science stations where they weighed, measured, drew and wrote about the fish in their oolichan booklets. The same week there was a whole school oolichan luncheon with Elders and community members participating in the preparation and eating. Students were also given the opportunity to try oolichan grease, a delicacy and traditional trading commodity. (Our school is located near the Grease Trail to the Nass River and Nishga territory where trading has

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been a practise for centuries.)

In May all classes participated in planting potatoes, onions and carrots in the community garden in Gitwangak. Many Elders and family members came to help as well. It is hoped that students will be helping to tend to the garden over the summer months and will help with the harvest in the Fall. All classes wrote about their gardening experience as a school wide writing topic.

As well, in the spring our Coho fry were released to the river. The Fisheries Officers remarked that it was the first time while working with school groups that Elders accompanied the class for the release and drummed and sang a traditional song and prayer to return the fish to their earth cycle.

All students prepared the soup for our Li'light. We had great participation and students sat with their mother clan in the Feast Hall. Each family received a Gitksan Language Book outlining the Feast System as described by Chief Walter Derrick (Gitanyow).

At the end of the year all Grade 7 students transitioning from our school to secondary school completed a full size cedar paddle with a design of their clan. This paddle will represent their journey as they continue on to graduate and pursuit post-secondary options.

Focus on Formative Assessment Strategies

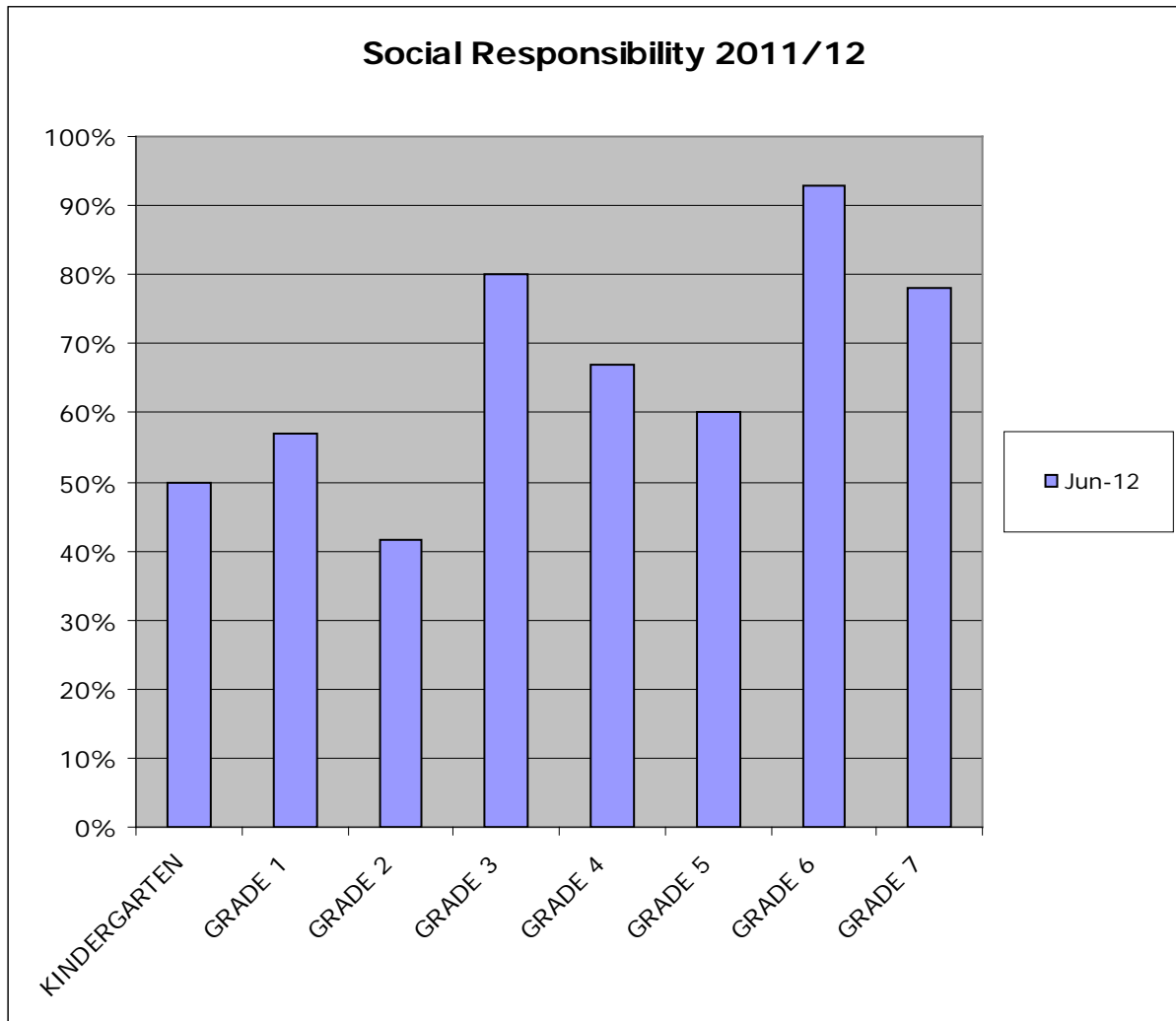
- Students were provided with the criteria for success by using rubrics for Good Buddy Responsibilities before working with the Elders and their younger buddies.
- Learners acted as learning/teaching resources for each other. The older students worked with an Elder coaching them on art forms and then the older buddy showed the younger student. Mr. Hill our “resident artist, language speaker and wisdom keeper” Elder told the students stories of respect and traditional values.

School Findings

We had planned to compare the report card levels for Social Responsibility but due to the job action this year we have compared the end of 2011 with the end of the 2012 school year. The comparison of the data leads to questions about the weather patterns this year (a longer winter), and about the school “climate.” The numbers meeting expectations decreased somewhat from last year. We can see from the data that we have cohorts that continue to need to grow in the area of Social Responsibility and self-regulation. Next year’s Grade 1, 2, and 3 groups will need continued support. The Grade 4 and Grade 7 groups for next year have reached 80% to 92% meeting or exceeding in Social Responsibility. These learners can act as role models and peer mentors for other groups.

	NY/A		M/ Ex.	
	%	#	%	#
June 2011	25	22	75	67
June 2012	34	30	66	59

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School Plans for 2012-2013

The W.I.T.S. anti-bullying resources have been acquired to be piloted in our district and used school wide next year. Teachers have had in-service on the MindsUP program and will continue to use these strategies next year. We welcome a new teacher leader to our school. Our new principal is of Gitksan and Tsimshian ancestry and brings renewed enthusiasm and energy to our school community. We will revise the door signs on each classroom door to reflect that the students of Kitwanga Elementary School will be the future graduates of 2018-2026.

Reflections, Advice

The extended family structure and the strong support that was provided is a tradition of great importance in all First Nations ways of life. We recognize that the Elders are the keepers of knowledge and as Lorna Williams (2005) reminds us, "It is important for us to consider what kinds of things we can do today to help the children make a connection to community and family...we need to reconstitute wisdom by which Indigenous people honor all life."