

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK
2011-2012**

**THORNHILL ELEMENTARY
#82 Coast Mountains**

Leadership Team

Deborah Koehn
Mike Cooley
Caroline Daniels
Pat Kolterman
Julia Nieckarz
Gerry Seymour

Contacts

debbie.koehn@cmsd.bc.ca
mike.cooley@cmsd.bc.ca
caroline.daniels@cmsd.bc.ca
patricia.kolterman@cmsd.bc.ca
julia.nieckarz@cmsd.bc.ca
gerry.seymour@cmsd.bc.ca

School Context/Community Involvement

Thornhill Elementary School is located in the beautiful Coast Mountains School District. This year over 200 students and 30 staff members participated in creating a dynamic learning environment. Thornhill Elementary School is interested in creating caring students by participating in a food sustainability program – it grows many vegetables that is shared during harvest season with the neighbourhood. Thornhill Elementary School boasts a salad bar, where many of the harvested foods are shared with the students at lunch. Thornhill Elementary students are proud of their Aboriginal heritage and many cultural aspects are shared through a fine arts program that includes traditional arts and drum playing. Educators at the school are interested in local First Nations culture. We currently are fortunate enough to have two male First Nations Support Workers in our building. Both of these men are extraordinarily compassionate and demonstrate great empathy for our First Nations' students. As well, we have community role models working in our building, making drums, sewing regalia, and teaching us different songs and dances. Thornhill Elementary School is a true community school, boasting an afterschool program available to all students, sports activities, community sponsored programs, and community evening access to the gym and school facilities. With a United Way grant that provides afterschool bussing, we are able to include many of our First Nations students that live on reserve with access to after school programs.

School Inquiry and Action

School Question

To what extent can classroom teachers embed Aboriginal learnings into day to day curricula, rather than having learning about Aboriginal World Views as an event?

We have a large number of First Nations students attending our school, and we celebrate many important events with song, dance and feasting, but we wanted to know how to bring day to day learning from an Aboriginal perspective into our classrooms. For instance, when the grade 7 students were learning about the Earth's crust in Science, they compared the Aboriginal Raven legends about the features of the Earth's surface to the scientific reasoning about the earth's crust faults.

Links to District Enhancement Agreement

Coast Mountains School District does not have a District Enhancement Agreement in place but have a Local Education Agreement. We are working within the literacy goals and Aboriginal goals established within that Agreement.

Strategies

We wanted to embed First Nations understandings and beliefs into day to day curriculum. With the grade 7 Science curriculum, we used Raven Tales and legends from the Northwest First Nations' people and compared how the stories explained occurrences in nature and how scientists explained the same occurrences. Students were able to build a repertoire of legends including the

**ABORIGINAL ENHANCEMENT SCHOOLS NETWORK
2011-2012**

explanation of Canada’s last volcanic eruption on Nisga’a land 250 years ago. Grade 5 students learned about local Aboriginal government, with a field trip to the Lissim government house. They learned the difference between a hereditary and an elected chief and compared the elector process with that of the Western European model. Learning was supported with local legends, visits from Chiefs and Elders and observations of local Aboriginal Government. This was an ideal time for us to integrate this learning, as regional First Nations peoples take on the Enbridge pipeline.

School Findings

| | NY | A | M | E |
|-------------|----|-----|-----|----|
| Fall 2011 | 5% | 45% | 47% | 3% |
| Spring 2012 | -- | 5% | 90% | 5% |

Aspect of Social Responsibility Performance Standards:

Exercising Democratic Rights and Responsibilities: shows a growing sense of responsibility toward the classroom, school, community and world, wants to make a difference but needs help identifying opportunities for action.

We believe that the students found the connections between the curriculum subject areas and the legends interesting, and made the learning more pertinent and valuable to the students. We saw some improvement in interest levels and the quality of questions directed to the Elders was outstanding. The feedback from the learners led us to believe that the students had developed a deep interest in the cultural connection to the science and social studies connections.

AESN Plans for 2012-2013

We need to continue to develop the connection between Aboriginal understandings and beliefs to the curriculum learning outcomes. As a school, we will be investing in more Aboriginal legends storybooks, and digital content so that students can independently pursue their interests and create independent connections. We need to more carefully record the curriculum connections and the books and oral legends that we are using.

Reflections, Advice

The adults involved in the inquiry had a high level of interest in pursuing local legends and stories. As well, we had a tremendous amount of support from our First Nations Resource Center, from Caroline Daniels, our role models and our First Nations Support Workers. We are very fortunate to have so many knowledgeable people within our building, and this has made our project that much easier.