



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Bear Creek Elementary

District: SD36 Surrey

Area of focus: Enhancement Agreement

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Question / focus area: How will transitioning to the school day with highly engaging activities or meaningful adult connections improve student attendance?

Scanning: Many of our Aboriginal learners are chronically late or absent (1 or more days/week) and during the elementary years they miss significant instructional time and meaningful, supportive connection with the school community. Irregular attendance contributes to developing gaps in learning, inadequate foundational skills, narrow band of friendships or peer relationships and limited opportunities for positive connections at school. These factors may often contribute to an increasing cycle of chronic absence.

Focus: The key area we focused on was student attendance including chronic lateness and absences throughout the school year. We defined chronic absence as being late or absent from school one or more days per week. Initially, we focused on “target students” (those enrolled in the inquiry team classes).

Data Group: Our target group consisted of 27 students from Kindergarten to Grade 7. There were 24 Aboriginal students and 3 non-Aboriginal students. They were identified by the chronic lates and absences from the 2012/2013 school year and the current year as observed (more than 20 lates/absences).

Hunch: Barriers to regular attendance are complex, so we identified ways the school could impact or improve attendance, including:

- How we connect with Aboriginal families
- How we transition Aboriginal students to the school day
- How we provide for student strengths, levels of engagement and interest during the school day
- How we create a sense of belonging for our Aboriginal students
- How we maintain meaningful relationships and connections to our Aboriginal students and their families

New professional learning: Our inquiry group incorporated a book club reading and focused on the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement so that we had a greater and more in-depth understanding. We also participated in the AESN network meetings scheduled throughout the year.

Taking action:

June, 2013: We created and conducted surveys for students, staff and parents. These surveys helped to gather information from all stakeholders about contributing factors (home, school and community) that effect student attendance. This provided baseline data.

Daily: A breakfast program, physical fitness, literacy activities, and some open classrooms were offered to students before school between 7:30 and 8:30am.

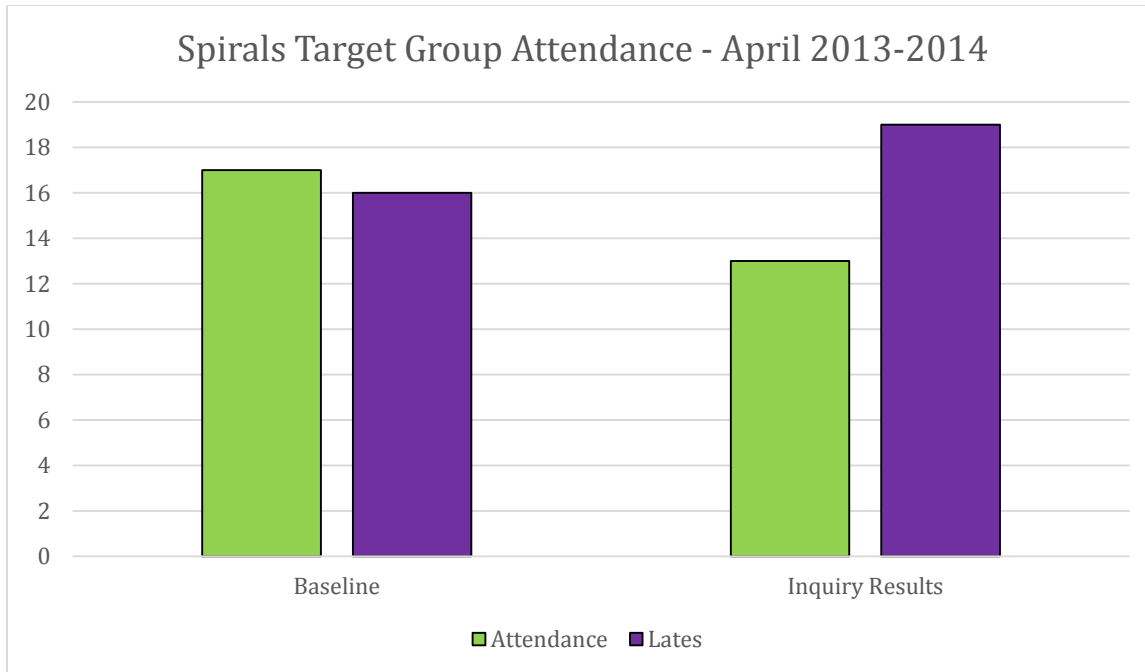
Weekly Class Activities: Each participating classroom had some “activity” materials with a few specialty bins that rotated with exciting activities like Kinex, puzzles, Lego, and Stacking Cups. Funds were allocated for each participating teacher to purchase materials appropriate for their student’s interest and age.

Each participating classroom teacher began the school day in a non-traditional way for students. Suggestions from the inquiry participants included:

- 1) Physical activity such as dance, yoga, and self-regulation with music
- 2) “Flashback to Kindergarten” or “Coffee Date” with games/building/art/play in class
- 3) Adult/student connection other than the teachers, “Adopt a student”
- 4) LST teachers having open rooms before the bell for morning check-ins
- 5) The Learning Principles from *The Nature of Learning* (OECD 2010)

The team felt it was important for each teacher to decide which activity suited the students best. Our focus would not be school-wide, but rather focus on the team members and targeted students within the team’s classrooms. Two LST teachers and the Aboriginal EA connected with the highest risk students who were not enrolled in classrooms of participating teachers and worked with them throughout the year.

Checking: We conducted a post-survey for our parents/guardians, students and staff in May, 2014. We compared this with the baseline data on student attendance for 2012–2013. The overall attendance improved. The overall number of lates increased, but the inquiry group did indicate that students were arriving to school “not so late” as in previous years.



The following information was gathered on the key question: *Can you name two caring adults in the building who believe you will be successful?* Students identified 20 different staff members who they felt would be successful in life. This included 13 classroom teachers and 7 support staff. Seven students indicated their friends first and then adults. Three students could not identify two adults who believed they would be a success in life.

Reflections/Advice: We learned that there are multiple factors contributing to chronic absence or lates, and that some of the factors are complex and within one school year, the school has minimal impact. Some of these include: weather, parental history, degree of illness, and personality traits. The school environment does have a significant impact on how school attendance is supported and recognized, as well as the student's well-being, connectedness and their sense of belonging. Older students can be more easily supported and influenced by the school staff than younger children, as a level of independence can positively impact regular attendance. As a way to engage parents and connect them to the school in a positive way, encourage them to participate in the activities with their children.