



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Delview Secondary School **District:** SD37 Delta

Area of focus: Enhancement Agreement

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Scanning: Our scanning process began with a question about the number of Aboriginal students at Delview who are affected by Residential Schools. This question was posed by the vice principal to the aboriginal support worker, and things took off from there. There was a realization that all students got some exposure to information about Residential Schools but that was only in Grade 9. We felt that it was very important that the whole school know more about Residential Schools and their effect on the Aboriginal community.

Focus: We focused on teaching the history of the Residential School system. We looked at the role of this institution and the effects it had on Aboriginal communities. This process/journey highlighted some untold history, which was new for many people and served as a catalyst for teachers to see the need for First Nation History to be embedded into the curriculum. The inquiry committee invited Residential School Survivors, members of First Nation Bands and all school staff to participate in this project.

Hunch: Our hunches were that the non-Aboriginal students did not have a very good understanding of what Residential Schools were and the effects they had on the Aboriginal community as a whole. This proved to be true in general. We felt that there needed to be more incorporation about this topic and an emphasis on integrating Aboriginal learning, knowledge and ways of learning. Our hunch is that we, as a school, could do more to deal with the "Truth" about Residential Schools and Aboriginal culture. By bringing in guest speakers, elders and encouraging teachers, we felt there could be more of an emphasis and incorporation of Aboriginal ways.

New professional learning: We used one afternoon of a professional development day for our Aboriginal support worker and one of her co-workers to talk to us about their experience with Residential Schools. This was a very powerful afternoon and it created a bond between the staff and the support workers. One of the biggest areas of professional learning was the exposure to, meeting and listening to the Elders and the Residential School Survivors. We enjoyed hearing their stories and learning about

Aboriginal ways. Committee members also researched and found a great deal of learning resources and shared that with the teachers at the school.

Taking action: We decided to have a Truth and Reconciliation day at the school. We started off with an opening school assembly that focused on the “Truth” aspect. The day then proceeded with many teachers incorporating information about Residential schools with the help of Elders or other Aboriginal subject matters into their class lessons. We had over 15 Elders at the school that day and they roamed from room to room. At the end of the day we had another school assembly and focused on the “Reconciliation” aspect. We blanketed elders, and there were dancers and singers who performed. Overall, it was an excellent event.

Checking: Was it enough? No, but it was a great starting point. The feeling is that we will have this “Reconciliation Day” every year from now on. There was also a feeling that teachers and students better understood Residential Schools and were more welcoming of Aboriginal ways of being and their culture. We used some very anecdotal evidence by casually interviewing staff and students about how the day went. The evidence was that the participants were more knowledgeable about the topic afterward. Next year we will look for more specific evidence.

Reflections/Advice: We have learned that people have a great deal of patience and sympathy for those who have had atrocities done to them. They are willing to listen, to learn, to understand and sympathize with those Survivors and their families. The plan is to do more next year and encourage teachers to get involved and plan lessons and units that focus on Aboriginal education. Our advice is to start the planning early, get the local elders involved in the planning, embrace the topics, and make it your own.