



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: LA Matheson Secondary **District:** SD36 Surrey

Area of Focus: Enhancement Agreement

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Question / focus area: How can we support Surrey's Aboriginal Education Enhancement Goals by implementing resources and strategies in both the humanities and math curriculum to improve both student achievement and increase cultural presence school wide?

Scanning: We noticed that students were struggling with curriculum, often times failing 2 or more classes. This level of academic struggle as well as clear signs of disengagement (tardiness, absences) was of utmost importance as it made traditional intervention methods hard to implement, and suggested perhaps a deeper level of issues (which was clearly evident by the amount of crisis management we were doing). For our team this meant we had to focus on multiple levels of intervention/communication and changes in order to try to help the students regain their footing both personally and academically.

Focus: We chose to focus on the resources and techniques utilized by teachers in both the math and humanities curriculum. By integrating more Aboriginal content, making the learning less centralized and more student-centered (in terms of using their Aboriginal heritage), could we get students re-engaged in a way that was more meaningful while helping them become more resilient?

Hunch: It seemed that in certain curricular areas, the styles utilized were rather narrow. For students dealing with multiple issues, the frustration that built up in one area simply transferred over and led to an overall collapse. Our hunch was that if we could change/adapt/modify certain techniques and provide teachers with the tools and resources necessary, we might be able to deal with frustrations more effectively and help the students maintain both academic and personal standing.

New professional learning: New professional learning in areas such as experiential education as well as trying to decolonize education where possible while also learning how to promote First Nations identity in an authentic fashion throughout the school were ways that we felt helped support our learning process. We are hoping to do more work in the areas of crisis management. At times we felt quite overwhelmed by the amount of

issues our students were faced with that were in a realm far beyond academics or general schooling.

Taking action: We took on increased immersion for both our Aboriginal students and our general population in first nations' history/culture. We had more one-on-one interaction with our Aboriginal students to check-in points and weekly breakfasts and experiential leadership activities. We attempted to use strengths-based strategies so that our communications were not solely based on something the student had done wrong. We tried to celebrate our students and their strengths and abilities, not only through more Aboriginal content but also through everyday behaviors at school. We certainly got very positive feedback from students and for some we did see a clear increase in positive interactions, academic standing, and active citizenship.

Checking: Our goal was to look at academic progress throughout the year along with behavioral incidents and see if our efforts had made an impact. We were hoping to meet with both students and family to see how they felt and also set a baseline for the following year so that an action plan was in place well before September. For some students we did see clear examples of resilience when struggling in classes as well as some students that saw a marked improvement in attendance. For some of our students, success was measured by the realization that perhaps a different atmosphere (such as a learning center) was required. This path rather than disengaging from school completely was still seen as a measure of success and we attributed to the constant contact and communication with the student through various methods.

Reflections/Advice: We've learned that it is quite a task to take on and that it is very much a multi-year initiative. We hope to continue with what we did this year but go for a more in-depth approach that centers on resilience as well as increased and more personalized attempts when it comes to maintaining academic standing. By promoting our Aboriginal family and its benefits, we hope that our students will feel more connected to themselves, their culture and their school and that none of these facets are holding them up in any way. Students did indeed appreciate all the effort, and even when you think you aren't taking steps forward, continue what you are doing. We found that when students made it through a particularly tough situation, they were ready and willing to take on a more active role and very much became part of the solution. While they were our *center of focus*, their input and leadership made them part of the team finding these solutions as well. Getting to that level of ownership is a goal well worth pursuing.