



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Nechako Elementary **District:** SD82 Coast Mountains

Area of focus: Enhancement Agreement

Inquiry Team Members: David Mills, Vivian Clayton, Joyce Amos and Kathleen Cherry

Community Involvement: Kitimat Museum and Haisla Community

Scanning: There were a number of First Nation students at Nechako Elementary that we were concerned about because these students seemed disengaged and were experiencing difficulty at school. Some of the students had behavioral issues and no connectedness to our school. This was a two-year study.

Focus: Will participation in a number of support groups, cultural activities and staff interventions improve a select group of First Nation students' engagement, academic success, behaviour and attendance at Nechako Elementary?

Hunch: There was a pattern in the behavior, academic success, and attendance of most of the targeted students. These students were struggling academically and are non-engaged in school activities. There didn't seem to be any connections with staff and they always seemed to be in the office and out of the classroom.

New professional learning: With new data our hope was to learn more about what activities and programs strengthen and solidify student relationships and increase participation in school programs and events for these students. Finally, identifying key activities and projects in class that students like may shed light on increasing engagement and academic performance. It's crucial to investigate why these students are disengaged and improve this perception so they actively engage in their education and school as some transition into middle school.

What the research says:

- A sense of belonging is hugely important
- Student school success is connected to a sense of belonging and that students who lack this sense may become isolated or lonely (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).
- A sense of belonging in one's and school community is even more vital today than in times past due to changes within family and community structure (Beck and Malley, 1998).

- Students with a strong sense of belonging report feelings of interest and confidence in school whereas those lacking this engagement feel anxious, bored and frustrated (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

How to foster a sense of belonging:

- An educational environment which is inclusive of culture, language and the Aboriginal world view would further increase this sense of belonging (Toulouse, 2006).
- Schools need to find a meaningful way to represent Aboriginal people’s contributions (Toulouse, 2006).
- A study on First Nations peoples in the Midwest found that resilience was increased by having increased levels of enculturation, perceived community support and a supportive mother. The strongest factor among these three was that of enculturation (LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver & Whitbeck, 2006). (added by Kathleen Cherry)

Taking action: To cultivate a culture of student engagement at the elementary level, we established a number of programs and activities in the class. One of our activities focused on cultural awareness as we’ve reached out for support to the Elders in the Haisla Village. The students worked on retelling a Haisla Legend with a children’s author. The group learned about the legend through Gordon Robinson’s book, Tales of Kitimat, originally published in in 1962. The Kitimat museum was also involved as some local artists helped the students.



HOW THE DEER GOT A SHORT TAIL
 A Haisla Legend by Gordon Robinson
 Retold by Students of
 Nechako Elementary School

*Nechako students, in back row from left to right, Maxime Turcotte, Isabelle Moretti, Emily McConnell, Kathleen Cherry, Calvin Benson, Kristeen Caruana and Kristyn Mallard
 Seated in front, from left to right, his Shiker, Jymesse Bolton, Alexa Duncan and Lukas Wilson. Absent from photo, Lakyla Franklin and Brandy Hans*

Students at Nechako Elementary School worked with children’s author and school counsellor, Kathleen Cherry, to retell this Haisla legend. The group learned about the legend through Gordon Robinson’s book, Tales of Kitimat , originally published in 1962. They loved the story and wanted to rewrite and illustrate it so that they might share it with younger children. Artists Kristen Caruana and Denise Pedro helped the students create vibrant illustrations.

Our First Nations workers engaged these students on a daily basis and provided feedback on their growth and development. They also introduced cultural activities across the school curriculum.

To increase these students sense of belonging we started “Meet and Greets” where a number of staff met and talked with these students on a daily basis to make a connection and give them a sense of belonging. In addition we provided some students with LINK support to work on social skills and provided counseling.

Checking: We used a survey as a method of inquiry. Each item was rated on a 4-point scale. Our survey consisted of five constructs: Students Relations, Academic Engagement, Student Sense of Belonging, Administration, and School Safety. We also used report card marks, attendance and office referrals as way of tracking student academic progress and student behavior as part of our baseline. We collected data for two years.

Key Findings from the survey and other data:

- In general students reported satisfaction in teacher student relations. Overall, less students agreed that teachers ask them to share ideas, or talk about what good work looks like. However, the 2014 survey outcomes showed more students felt that their teachers asked them to share their ideas and talked to them about what good work looked like. Students across all groups reported that they like what they are learning in their core classes. In academics fewer students received “I” (incomplete) or a failing grade.
- 6/9 students did not like Science.
- Despite the fact that students enjoyed what they’re learning 4/9 felt disengaged at school. 7/9 completed their homework.
- Students indicated that they have friends at school and that they are comfortable talking to most adults at the school (an increase over the previous year).
- It would appear that more of the students like being at school and they fit in (7/9 compared to 4/9 in 2013).
- Students view their school administration and office staff as caring, friendly, and helpful.
- Most students report that they feel safe at school and know whom to talk to if they are being bullied.
- Office referrals were down considerably with only 7 referrals compared with 38 in 2013-14.
- Suspensions were down from six to two.

- Attendance was unchanged from last year with a slight increase in total absences for 2014.
- Two students remained disengaged and had poor attendance.

Absences		Academics by Subjects		Office Referrals		Suspensions	
2012-13	13-14	2012-13	13-14	2012-13	13-14	2012-13	13-14
187	194	28- Incompletes 19-failures	17- Incompletes 10-failures*	38	7	6	2

*One student accounted for 8 of the failures in one term

Reflection: Overall, the individual student’s perceptions about their school remain positive from 2012 to 2014. The programs and activities in the class and school had an impact on these nine students. We saw increased participation in sports activities and leadership groups over the two years. The students enjoyed participating in cultural activities in large and small groups. Most of the nine students will be moving up to the middle school.

Results support the idea that student engagement is good, however, teachers report that several students had very low engagement and did not attend regularly. Attendance is still an area of concern and sustaining some of these programs will remain a challenge. As a staff we need to continue efforts to strengthen and solidify all student relationships and keep them engaged in the school. In addition we need to continue to analyze data to identify strengths and concerns that affect our First Nation students here at Nechako.

HOW THE DEER GOT A SHORT TAIL

A Haisla Legend by Gordon Robinson
Retold by Students of
Nechako Elementary School

Authors and Illustrators:

Calvin Benson, Jynesse Bolton, Alexa Duncan, Lakayla Franklin, Brandy Hans, Kristyn Maitland, Emily McConnell, Isabelle Moretti, Iris Striker, Maxime Turcotte, Lukas Wilson

Editor and author in residence: Kathleen Cherry

Visiting illustrators: Kristen Caruana and Denise Pedro

Nechako Elementary School would like to thank the Haisla people for allowing them to retell this wonderful legend.

The students would also like to thank the Kitimat Museum and artists Kristen Caruana and Denise Pedro.

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