



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Nakusp Secondary School, Nakusp Elementary School

District: SD10 Arrow Lakes

Area of focus: Transitions

Inquiry Team Members: Julia Flesaker, Leslie Leitch

Contact Information: jflesaker@gmail.com Phone # 250-265-3668

Question / focus area: How can we make the transition from elementary school to high school more meaningful and comfortable for young students?

Scanning: Nakusp Secondary School is a large school and serves a catchment area from New Denver to Edgewood. Many students who arrive at the secondary school have come from small multi-grade classrooms. This next year there are 30 grade seven students in Nakusp Elementary. If these students do not have older siblings or friends already attending Nakusp Secondary School, then the move across the street can be daunting. These transition difficulties are also heightened when that student has special needs or experiences anxiety. Suddenly students are in amongst senior students and they will need to feel comfortable with themselves in that situation. Ideally it would be beneficial to begin transitions in earlier intermediate grades.

Focus: Will working with classes at the high school help break down barriers, increase comfort levels, and sense of belonging, if we offer the opportunity to co-teach and learn within the high school classrooms, enable visits to both schools multiple times and coordinate field trips with secondary and elementary classes? We have consulted with our local Aboriginal education coordinator and a Ganishka Silverfox-Dann, a local Elder.

Hunch: There is often a rush at the end of the year to bring grade 7 students up to the high-school for an orientation. One day at a school with a short tour does not increase comfort levels and a connection with sense of place. It doesn't honor indigenous ways of knowing.

New professional learning: We will be learning about building professional relationships with the elementary school teachers and the needs of intermediate students as they move from elementary to high-school. We'll be expanding our network of connectedness with Aboriginal Elders and community. Together we will create a more respectful and indigenous-informed way of transitioning students from elementary schools to the local high school.

Taking action: The Nakusp Elementary School grade 7 class and Nakusp Secondary School Biology 11, Science 8 and Social Studies 9 classes will collaborate on several projects including:

- A heritage fair/button blankets
- Lab dissection
- Grade 7-12 Soccer
- *Project of the Heart Art* initiative
- Tour of high school with grade 8 peers
- Time with individual teachers in classrooms
- Grade 7 dance
- Orientation BBQ
- Parent/student/teacher/staff discussion about high school expectations
- Field study together to build relationships
- Fish hatchery tour and kokanee dissection
- Grade 7 students visited the high school

Checking: We used observations, data and student comments to measure the difference in students' feelings of connectedness. At the beginning of the year, 29% of the students felt very comfortable about going to the high school. 52% felt okay. 20% were nervous to some extent. By June, 52% of the kids felt very comfortable, 37% felt okay and 11% were nervous to some extent.

In June, the kids who were very comfortable cited friends, siblings, familiarity and a love of change as to why they were comfortable. The kids who felt okay were mostly worried about such a big change and where each class would be held. The students who were a bit nervous were concerned with classes in different classrooms and new rules. Overall, the comfort level had increased significantly over the year.

At the beginning of the year, the reasons given for nervousness and concern included needing more time at the high school, wanting more math help, knowing the system, meeting new kids and teachers, confusing hallways, being scared, having harder work, being with taller people, not having the opportunity to visit the high school, finding the way around and feeling tiny.

It appears that increased time spent at the high school, involvement with classes and teachers there and more discussion around the change went a long way to make kids more comfortable about attending high school in the fall.

Reflections/Advice: We learned that more frequent and regularly scheduled activities and everyday events provide ample opportunity for students to become more familiar and comfortable with the high school. It may be beneficial to have grade 7 students attend occasional P.E. and home economic classes, ABC performances, dances, special celebrations and fun activities. Because we also have a few grade 7 students joining the high school from Edgewood every September, it is imperative to include the Southern Zone teacher in planning activities.