



2014-2015 AESN Case Study

School: École Mission Central Elementary **District:** #75 Mission

Area of Focus: Enhancement Agreement

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Focus for this year: Halq'emeylem Language Project – Kindergarten to Grade 3. This year, our project has expanded to include Grade 3 students and parents.

Scanning: “Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.” This is the First Peoples Principles of Learning that has guided our work for the past four years as we have implemented the Halq'emeylem Language project at Mission Central Elementary. This year, our school district signed a new Enhancement Agreement. The mission of this agreement states that “Working as a community, we will enhance student empowerment by developing the skills, wellness, confidence, and self-reliance necessary for our children and youth to flourish and prosper throughout their life journey”. We recognize the need to build a strong and cohesive community at our school.

Focus: Recognizing that language and culture (embedded in an oral history) are intertwined, our main focus was to continue to develop cultural awareness and pride though expanding a Halq'emeylem language program that began three years ago. Goal #1 of the Enhancement Agreement states: to ensure that all students are learning about and respecting Aboriginal peoples, culture and history. This year, in addition to the Kindergarten to Grade 2 program, Grade 3 students (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), all Central families had the opportunity to explore the language through an afterschool program offered by Siwal Siwes.

Hunch: In the past, staff has observed that students appear to be divided along differing lines: Aboriginal, Non-Aboriginal and French Immersion. Our work towards finding common understandings that bring us together as a whole has been important to our staff. We were confident that patiently continuing to explore the identity of Sto:lo people and the Halq'emeylem language we would be a more connected whole.

New professional learning: Several staff members participated in the UBC MOOC course, Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education. In addition, we had some staff members participate in the evening Halq'emeylem classes for families.

Taking action: We booked our School District Halq’emeylem teachers (Donna and Peter) to work with each primary class for 30 minutes, two times per week from September to June. Our Kindergarten French Immersion class performed Jingle Bells in several languages, including in Halq’emeylem at the Christmas Concert in December. For our Siwal Siwes Cultural Day in February, we booked Peter to teach Halq’emeylem to the intermediate classes. In most cases, this was the first Halq’emeylem experience for the older students.

We completed an artist in residency project with Bonnie Krulicki, an Aboriginal artist from Chilliwack, whose main goal is to teach the Halq’emeylem language through art. The students completed a beautiful canvas which features the Halq’emeylem word, “yoyatel” which means making friends with one another. Each student and staff member received a T-Shirt with the word printed on the front. The goal is that when they are out in the public they can share the language and their experiences at Central, thereby making friends with the community. All Mission Central families and staff were invited to participate in the after school Halq’emeylem sessions during the month of April – we had one family and two staff members attend. We hope to build on this next year.

Checking: We continue to have a very high (98%) number of Aboriginal students report that they are proud to be First Nations, Metis or Inuit on the Siwal Siwes Sense of Belonging Survey. We have several staff members participating in professional learning as offered by Siwal Siwes, which is new learning for them.

Reflections/Advice: The students continued to enjoy the Halq’emeylem Language program as delivered by Peter and Donna. Recognizing that learning requires patience and time, we hope to expand the Language Program to include Grade 4 students in the 2015-16 school year. Bringing our school community together, we have embarked on a process to explore our individual and collective identities, which will strengthen us a whole.