



2014-2015 AESN Case Study

School: Nechako Elementary **District:** #82 Coast Mountains

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Scanning: We have the same group of parents show up to all our activities. Although we've tried a number of initiatives in the past to increase parent involvement we have been getting poor parent participation in some of our school events. We usually get about half our parents out for events such as open house, teacher parent interviews and important assemblies.

Focus: Our question: How can we improve parent involvement in school activities especially with our First Nation parents?

Hunch: Our building has to be more inviting and we must improve our communication with parents. We must consider the timing of our events and provide more opportunities for parents to participate.

New Professional Learning: Parent involvement has a direct link to student achievement. Parents are encouraged to participate in their children's education in a variety of ways both at home and in school. It was suggested by Dr. Lorna Williams that we make our schools more inviting (welcoming) and we engage all parents before events well in advance. With new data our hope is to learn more about what activities and programs strengthen and solidify student and parent relationships and increase participation in school programs and events.

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).

Factors for success:

Actively involve parents and families in schools and communities (Brandt, 1992; Reyhner, 1992; National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, n.d.; Trujillo & Alston, 2005). (Taken from Lorna Williams presentation August 2014)

Taking action: To cultivate a culture of student and parent engagement at the elementary level, we asked our staff to help promote a more welcoming environment. Also we have focused on developing a cultural and beautification committee to make our school more inviting and promote Aboriginal Culture.

Our LINK worker and Counsellor are taking the initiative by making, home visits, phone calls and other parent interactions. In addition we are inviting parents to provide classroom enrichment activities such as discussing their occupation, hobby, or talent. They may also provide art, music, or a cultural awareness program. We are asking them to assist as a helper or tutor, accompany field trips, or perform a variety of routine administrative duties with our PAC. We're trying to be more flexible with the time of day and location of meetings and activities as hopefully this will allow all parents to take part at least occasionally. Finally we are going try to schedule special events that will not conflict with other school or community activities. Our intent is to provide "opportunities to be active in school and community affairs, work alongside" (Lorna Williams)

Checking: We're going to track the number of parents that attend events as well as specific participation by individual families. Our open house was our first big event for parents and the participation was much higher than expected. This success we believe was due in part to a number of new initiatives introduced, for example, we gave ourselves more time to communicate with parents instead of the traditional time of the second week back. We also added a First Nation information table and we had a book exchange. Mrs. Cherry was also selling the book that she published with a number of our First Nation students. We asked the teachers to count the number of parents attending in each grade. We're thinking of Inviting Parental Involvement through Survey Forms. We will probably think of additional ways to gather evidence as we move through the inquiry process.

Our Literacy Night was one of the highlights of the year as we brought in unexpected numbers for the February 2015 event over 60% of our population came out for this event. This was well attended by some of our Aboriginal parents who rarely attend events at the school.

Still our numbers for teacher parent interviews in the March were very disappointing as only 14% of our parent population turned out despite our efforts to advertise more. Our Volunteer list was down by about 20%. Also, IEP meetings were poorly attended in October 2014 and May 2015.

We had a wonderful turn out for our school play as all parents watched one of the two performances in April and helped raise over \$3700 towards our stage concerns.

We hope to continue to increase our parent participation starting in the fall with a Wellness Open House in September and teacher parent interviews. Literacy Night in February 2016 will also be a highlight but our focus will be getting parents to attend the teacher parent interviews in the first and second terms and IEP meetings in 2015-16. We will also be looking for more volunteers in 2015-16.