



2014 - 2015 AESN Case Study

Schools: North Peace Secondary, Bert Bowes Middle School, Dr Kearney Middle School, Energetic Learning Campus, Prespatou School

District: #60 Peace River North

Area of Focus: Transitions

Inquiry Team Members: Ashley Beerling, Brian Campbell, Jason Gill, Torben Graham, Jody Hickey, Rob Horsman, Kris Isenor, Pat Jansen, Stephen Petrucci, Barb Wagner, All school Aboriginal Student Support Workers (ASSWs)

Our focus for this year: Improving student transitions to increase positive student outcomes and implementation of an onsite Aboriginal Transition Coach program. Duties included the following:

- conversations and goal setting using the Learning Journey template
- close monitoring of achievement information
- advocacy for students – speaking to teachers about altering assignments or incorporating student interests in the assignments
- small group and one-on-one tutorial for academic support above and beyond what the school offers – food will be offered to students
- The purpose of tutoring differed at the Middle and High School level:
 - at the Grade 9 level to build a sense of efficacy where students feel they will be successful in the Senior High, therefore will have the confidence to attend their next school
 - at the Grade 10 level to promote success in the Grad program academics and continue to build success and confidence

We chose the area of student transitions as we noted that students seemed to find Grade 10 difficult upon moving from their local middle schools. We hoped to instill more confidence, a growth mindset and a better skillset by implementing our onsite Aboriginal Transition Coach program where another positive adult would be available to students for extra emotional and academic support.

Scanning: At the beginning, we scanned academic achievement of our Aboriginal students. How many were successful in the core courses in Grade 9? We noticed that many were failing their grade 9 classes but because our district policy is ‘promotion with intervention’ they would be enrolled in grade 10 at a secondary school campus. How did the Aboriginal students present in Grade 10? We felt that students were unprepared academically and therefore

lacked confidence in their learning in their grade 10 classes, which was the beginning of the Grad Program. This seemed to be detrimental to their ability to graduate on time, within the 6 year window. Our Six Year Grad Rate was declining.

During our project we put our Aboriginal students at the centre and we found out that many were engaged in a substantial amount of learning – learning done side-by-side with their Elders: hunting, dancing, trapping, gathering medicinal plants, using horses, preparing meat or building shelters. While students were learning practical skills, they were also learning about the Indigenous worldview and about their connection with the land.

Subsequently, we developed a course honouring their Indigenous Learning. We found that when students in our small pilot group were engaged in their Learning from the Elders projects, they became more interested in completing schoolwork too. They were gaining skills in reading and writing while working on the content most important to them.

The OECD Principles at work in this project were:

- *Learners at the center*: coaches helped students to set goals, think about goals, monitor their progress toward those goals and re-evaluate as time went on. In our scanning process, we noted that while we had some general supports in place we needed to focus on our Aboriginal learners specifically so we needed to put them ‘at the center’ of our work.
- *Recognizing individual differences*: coaches worked closely with classroom teachers, ASSWs and learning assistance teachers to plan appropriate learning environments and to adjust assignments to meet the needs of the students. Many of our Aboriginal learners do learn from their Elders on weekends, in the evenings and during school holidays and we found that this learning was every bit as robust and rigorous as any other elective course offered. As an aside, we found that some of our other students spend inordinate amounts of time learning from their Elders too, so next year we will offer this course to students in our Mennonite community, as well.
 - Board Authority Approved (BAA) Learning from Our Elders 10, 11, 12 was passed by our school board to allow our students to gain credit for their work with their Elders – encouraging, validating and honouring their Indigenous Learning was critical for several students and they started to do better in their regular classes, both in terms of attitude and achievement. Our first Presentations of Learning will be held this fall, for this coursework. See Appendix 3

First People’s Principles of Learning at work in this project were:

- *Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential and relational*: our students even called their Elders during work sessions, they taught us phrases from the Dena Za language, they learned about their worldview as handed down through the generations.
- *Learning involves the exploration of one’s identity*: while this was truly evident in the pilot group involved with the BAA course, it was also evident in working with the larger group of students as the Learning Journey ‘teases’ out the dreams, hopes and wishes of the students based on their strengths. This helps us to determine correct class placements for them in their transition plans.

Hunch: We needed a classroom teacher to act as a coach to be able to provide the kind of assistance students needed in terms of improving their academic achievement – emotional support and the development of a positive attitude toward learning were integral in this process. Our ASSWs had always acted as excellent advocates but because they weren't classroom teachers, they were unable to provide the same level of support that an experienced classroom teacher could provide. In the past, we did not provide enough transition support for our Aboriginal students between Middle and High School and some students felt lost in the larger setting, lacking confidence in their ability to be successful in Grade 10.

New professional learning: We used as many resources from First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) that we could find. We attended the FNESC conference and the sessions helped us to develop more knowledge in working successfully with our Aboriginal learners. To be honest, we simply had to understand our learners better. We needed to know what the kids did on their personal time with their Elders and we had to really listen to the Aboriginal community to completely understand what they hoped for and what they wanted for their children in the school system.

Taking action:

Aboriginal Transition Coaches:

- .143 FTE Aboriginal Transition Coach at each Middle and High School
- Purpose: to help students gain more confidence and skill in the academic areas in order to feel more confidence in transitioning into the Grade 10 Grad Program
- Emotional support and encouragement
- Goal setting and continuous prompting and development of a growth mindset
- Close monitoring of student achievement with timely intervention
- Advocacy with classroom teachers to enhance the learning environment for our Aboriginal learners

BAA Learning from Our Elders Course:

- Passed by our School Board with implementation in March
- Pilot group in 2014-15, first Presentation of Learning to occur Fall 2015
- Full course offering in second semester of 2015-16
- Expanded to all schools

Careers Partnership

Dual Credit/Apprenticeship/Work Experience

- worked closely with Careers Staff to embark on the following:
 - Aboriginal Career Coach:
 - to help match kids to careers and to help them prepare for entry into the programs through organizing trades ticket classes (H2S Alive, First Aid, Transport of Dangerous Goods, WHMIS)

Checking:

APPENDIX 1: Core Course Success

Aboriginal Transition Coach Data (as of July 2015)

Percent of Aboriginal Students Passing Core Courses in Current Year

	#Students	English 9	Math 9	Socials 9	Science 9
Bert Bowes Middle School	23	96%	91%	96%	96%
Dr. Kearney Middle School	37-39	82%	73%	82%	87%
Prespatou School	5	100%	60%	100%	80%

Percent of Aboriginal Students Passing Core Courses in Current Year

	#Students	English 10	Math 10	Socials 10	Science 10
Energetic Learning Campus	24	79%	75%	88%	83%
North Peace Secondary	27-33	85%	79%	87%	70%
Prespatou School	4-6	0%	33%	0%	40%

APPENDIX 2: Qualitative Data

Quotes from our Aboriginal Transition Coaches:

“I think the Aboriginal Transition Coach position has helped our Aboriginal students this year. Now that the students know me, they are asking for academic help. Their teachers are also talking to me about the students and their learning.” --Barb Wagner, DK

“The real success I would say would be with the Grade 9s. They seem to be motivated and really connected with their Learning Journeys. They get excited talking about finishing high school, going to college or the jobs they want to do later on. They are coming to tutoring and are thankful for the opportunity. One student who spent all last year very quiet, not handing in work has started talking more and saying she wants to graduate. I can't really describe the look in her eyes but it went from distrust and defeat to actually having hope! She is handing in much of her work now.” --Kris Isenor, Prespatou

“Relationships are the most important part of my job. The students that I formed the best relationships with are the ones that I've seen be the most successful this year. My first step was getting to know them (students with incompletes) and slowly start building that trust. Within a short while they were coming to me regularly, at first to chat, but eventually they started accepting help and within a few months, they had brought their grades to passing and have maintained this throughout the year.” --Ashley Beerling, ELC

“My favourite part of the Aboriginal Transition Program was having weekly checkins to keep me on track. I am doing so much better in my classes since I started checking in with Mrs. Beerling on Mondays to get my work organized. I hope I can check in with someone next year at the

high school. I also liked having someone ask questions too, whenever I needed, and liked working with Mrs. Beerling during class time.” --Clayton Cook, ELC

“He just keeps me caught up when I miss school. It helps me feel a little more confident when I go back to class.” --Drayden Field, BB

Academic Success:

- overall grade 9 core course success has improved – more students are passing core classes so should be more confident entering grade 10
- math results have improved but still need to focus on this area
- Prespatou Grade 10s need intensive support!
- continuous support is necessary in the core classes

Increased feeling of support:

- when asked about their feelings, Aboriginal students overwhelmingly agreed that the AB Transition Coach had helped them
- the addition of another positive adult that students can go to, helped them feel more supported and cared about
- need to organize some information for schools in a general sense – First People’s Principles of Learning
- need to find ways to help the coach be more flexible and available to students in the Senior High School setting
- Add a short term goal section to the Learning Journey

Careers:

- many students accessed the trades ticket courses
- many students were supported in their journey to get ready for transition to an apprenticeship or to work experience
- we need to organize the Lunch n Learns – lunches featuring guest speakers of Aboriginal origin who are local careers people – to give students an opportunity to ask questions, see into a ‘day in the life’ of a particular career, to give students a sense of agency “I could be a doctor too or I could be a welder too”

Reflections/Advice: Patience is key. Students needed time to develop trust with our coaches. Always know that the Aboriginal students are capable, brilliant and amazing! Seek to find ways to encourage children in their learning, whatever that learning might be: skinning a moose or completing a powerpoint! Be open-minded! We have all learned so much from our students!

Develop some sort of Learning Journey that allows for a discussion of the dreams and aspirations of a student. Use this information to actually plan appropriate programs to utilize a student’s strengths. Incorporate short term and long term goals and make sure kids get an opportunity to reflect on them...we didn’t do this enough.

Another caring adult in the school setting was very positive for our Aboriginal students, especially because they were the sole focus of the attention from the AB Transition Coaches.

If technology is necessary, then make sure the students actually have access to the internet outside of school time, to complete the assignments that require specific applications. While technology can be a great equalizer for students with 'speech to text' and other applications, students can find themselves at a disadvantage if they do not have a computer or access to the internet.

Our positive relationship with our Aboriginal community continues to grow and strengthen. It is essential that the district work together with all communities in responding to the needs of our Aboriginal students. Together we learn!

