



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Beaver Creek Elementary

District: #36 Surrey

Inquiry Team Members:

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Our focus for this year: The focus of our inquiry was Aboriginal transitions through developing relationships in meaningful ways.

Scanning: Many of our Aboriginal families are new to our Beaver Creek community due to the closure, renovation and subsequent re-opening of the housing complex in our catchment. Many of our families struggle to get to school on time and attendance is sporadic, in some cases. Parents reported that some of our students were missing school due to not having food at home to send for lunch. Attendance at our school events such as parent/teacher interviews, Ready Set Learn and PALS and Welcome to Kindergarten was very low for our Aboriginal families. When staff interviewed students using the four questions, it was evident that students felt disconnected to the school community and had little sense of belonging. One of the First People's Principles is that learning is holistic, reflexive, experiential and relational. Through our scanning, we are able to recognize that students weren't able to build that connectedness and reciprocal relationship between school and home. Recognizing that learning involves patience and time, Beaver Creek staff is committed to developing meaningful relationships with our Aboriginal community.

Focus: The members of the inquiry team selected this area because they wanted to develop meaningful relationships with our Aboriginal community. We know that having better connections will benefit the students' academic and social emotional growth.

Hunch: At the beginning of the year, when students arrived late to school, they needed to sign in and get a late slip before going to class. As it is a large, busy school, sometimes there were many students at the office and signing in a loud, crowded environment could have been a negative experience. We wondered if we changed the environment at the start of the day if that would create a more positive start for our students. We were concerned about our students not coming to school because some parents reported that they did not have food in the house to send for lunch. We wondered if providing a breakfast program would encourage our students to be on time for school and assist parents with food security. We wondered if providing events for families with a specific Aboriginal focus both at the school and at the housing complex would allow families to feel comfortable and help in the process to develop more trusting relationships.

New professional learning: Our inquiry group worked in collaboration with the school district's Aboriginal Department Helping and Advocate teachers. Their experience and knowledge has

been invaluable in guiding our work. One of our staff members attended a conference where she participated in the BCTF Blanket Exercise and was so moved by the experience that she requested that we invite a facilitator to our school. We look forward to participating in this experience at our professional development day at the end of May 2016.

Taking action: The focus of our inquiry this year was Aboriginal transitions through developing relationships in meaningful ways. We looked for ways that we could connect with our Aboriginal community in a variety of ways – transitioning to school from home and transitioning to Kindergarten.

In January, we received a grant from the Vancouver Sun Adopt-a-School funding to provide breakfast to our students. A small but mighty group of volunteers greet our students and serve them a nutritious meal each morning. Several families attend with their school-aged children and this has been invaluable in creating positive interactions between staff and parents.

To address the congestion in the office at the beginning of the day, teachers agreed to postpone sending their attendance for ten minutes. To begin with, our Principal and Vice-Principal greeted families at the front door and asked them to head straight to class. They no longer have to do this as families now check in with the classroom teachers. We also changed the wording on our late slips to acknowledge we are grateful they came to school.

One staff member has created the Champions Club which meets every Thursday at lunch. Students are welcomed and supported to complete any assignments that they need help with.

In February, we took our PALS (Parents as Literacy Supporters) session to the housing complex. Working together with the on-site counselor, teachers created several stations that focused on Aboriginal themes. Although there were only a few families in attendance, school staff went door to door at the end of the event to say hello and give out bags containing books and other early learning materials. We're hoping that this small action of reaching out to families not in attendance will help with the transitions to kindergarten for future students and families.

Plans for the end of the year include a Bannock and Books program for preschool and school aged Aboriginal children and their families and an Aboriginal Day assembly which will feature the Salmon and the connection to the legend of Beaver Creek.

Checking: We are making slow progress towards our goal of developing more positive relationships with our Aboriginal community. We are pleased with the number of students (up to 25 some days) who are accessing our breakfast program and staff report that attendance and student engagement for our Aboriginal learners has improved. We have been told by a number of people that when one walks in to our school, it has a friendly feel. We have worked hard to welcome and appreciate all of our students and their families. The staff who presented Aboriginal PALS were disappointed with the turn out for their February session (two families). However, at our Ready Set Learn event in April, we had two new Aboriginal families attend – we have never had any Aboriginal families attend any of our early literacy events in the past.

Reflections/Advice: Developing positive relationships with our Aboriginal families that are based on trust takes time. We think we are making slow and steady progress and look forward to continuing our work next year.