



2015-2016 AESN Case Study

School: Guildford Park Secondary

District: #36 Surrey

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Our focus for this year: We have been looking at the transition of our Aboriginal grade 7 students from our elementary schools to grade 8, and exploring ways to help the kids overcome their anxieties and roadblocks to success

Scanning: We were continuing on information from last year's project. This was hindered a bit as two of the key people from last year were no longer involved in the project. We took stock of the experience students had had with three different transition programs our school had used. The first was a general grade 7 orientation with involves all incoming students. The second was a new program last year, which was an additional day involving Aboriginal learners at the school. The third was a transitions summer program open to the general population, but heavily used by Aboriginal learners. We incorporated the key questions in the survey (in slightly modified format.)

We particularly were interested in how the responses where students felt connected to adults in the building match students who had had the most time in the building – i.e., those who attended the summer program. Our family of schools team felt that an aim for the year should be to give students more chances to build those connections.

Focus: We know that many learners, particularly our Aboriginal learners, struggle with the transition to high school. We also found that students who connect in grade 8 in a significant way to the school do better over their entire high school career.

Hunch: We know that high school is intimidating. We know that students have a hard time connecting to adults in the building on their own, which can be the only option for some students. We also know that the continuous changing of personnel can make connections even more challenging. We also felt that the Aboriginal department needed more visibility within the school community.

New professional learning: As a newcomer to the role of Aboriginal Academic Advocate, I found the mentoring of people inside the school, particularly by the Aboriginal Youth Care Worker (AYCW) team, and through the district Aboriginal Department team invaluable. We tried to create opportunities to link our high school and elementary schools in new ways, extending the contact grade 7s have with the high school community. We arranged visits and presentations. We wanted to strengthen the relationships between us and the elementary schools as a staff, as well. The information from our survey was a good tool for starting the conversation within departments of the school, such as the Learner Support Team (LST). Much of what I learned was about the processes within the district and our elementary schools, as well as the responsibilities of my new role.

Taking action:

1. Building connections between high school and elementary school staff – We feel we had a stronger connection between the elementary school AYCW and the high school. We were able to involve them in the decision making, and many of our new ideas came from the needs they saw at their end. It has been a very valuable process for me, as Academic Advocate. I was also able to liaison between the elementary youth workers and teachers and our secondary teachers.

We had less success when trying to encourage an increase in visits to the high school. We hope that next year, when people have had more time to think about these activities, they will be embraced more. We had people sign up for fine arts tours, and then cancel. We had people not sign up for other activities. We opened up our after school tutoring to all grade 7 students, but not one has taken the risk to do so. We will continue to build on these opportunities and hope to scaffold the students into coming. We see the tutoring as a particularly useful link for grade 7s to make, as it creates positive connections with mentors and good work habits before the grade 7 year finishes.

2. Increased visibility for the Aboriginal Department – this was a physical change to the school. We had no signage for the Aboriginal office space in September. We are very lucky to have this space in a prominent place – right across from the main school office. School leaders arranged for formal signage in the same style as other places in the school. We were also able to commission four students to paint three canvases which are now mounted over the door that welcome everyone to Coast Salish Land. We want Aboriginal students to see that they are an important and valued part of the school that the school is proud of.

3. Grade 7 Aboriginal Student Orientation – We took the information from our grade 7 survey and used it to transform the Aboriginal student orientation that had launched last year. As connection to an adult seemed to be the most valuable to students, we wanted to help grade 7s find at least one adult they are familiar with in the new school. The event was held May 18th, 2016. We had counsellors, youth workers, and other staff who worked in small groups on identifying supports in the school with the grade 7s. This worked as a support piece to the mainstream grade 7 orientation which followed two weeks later.

4. Individualized tours of the high school – We had one pair of grade 7s come over for an early tour of the school. Although they were overwhelmed by the experience, they both said that it helped a little bit. We will continue to offer this as an activity for the rest of the year and in the future. This also gives students a chance to meet supportive adults in the building one more time.

5. Incorporating student feedback into orientation and grade 8 startup - We will take some of the concrete suggestions students had, particularly around some of the logistics new grade 8s struggle with, and incorporate them into our practices for all the grade 8s to try and help ease the transition into high school.

Checking: Our surveys indicated that students were able to identify two adults who cared about them in the building by the end of October. We felt that was a great testament to our school's culture and programming. What was also interesting was the breadth of staff that those comments took in. There were literally people from every part of the building and every department. What we have set out to do is to try and make those connections before the grade 7s arrive.

The goals we have around transitions are daunting. The changes we made were only a tiny beginning to the process. We found the logistics of the process time consuming and complex. Coordinating between the elementary schools and the high schools was particularly so. We won't be able to see if there has been any difference in the transition until after next September. However, at the staff end, our informal feedback is that the connections between the schools are stronger. Our art unveiling of the recognition of territory was very well received. We will continue to try and foster experiences at the high school for the grade 7s which allow them to connect with adults in a meaningful way.

As our new team has established itself in the Aboriginal office, we have seen the community there grow, particularly with grade 8s and 9s. We hope that this will transfer into a stronger school community over all, as well as a stronger network for new students to tie into.

Reflections/Advice:

Reflection: This process has been a difficult one to step into mid-stream. Data collection will continue, as well as the process of pulling that information into future actions. It is also now clear that students will not return surveys for goody bags of school supplies, but they will return them for candy.

What's next: We want to look at two other points of difficult transition for students – grade 10 and graduation. We are looking at some tangible way for students to mark their successes through high school, as well as supports in classes like English 10.

Advice: I learned that when you ask for something, sometimes you get it! Our school leaders facilitated several of the items we needed without us having to use our own funds. However sometimes requests do not get any response, such as with our invitations to elementary schools. We will continue to build those patterns of connection as we see them as so valuable. These connections will happen slowly, but will be long lasting if we can create a good bond. Some aspects seemed to happen either very quickly or very slowly.

The survey information returned to us is as follows:

GRADE 8 follow-up survey – Summary for November meeting. 12 surveys returned.

1. Did you attend the grade 7 Aboriginal orientation last spring here at Guildford Park? yes / no

Yes – 12 No - 0

Answer the following questions only if you answered yes to the above question. Circle the answers that fit you the best. If you did not attend the Aboriginal Orientation, go to number 2 on page 2.

A) Do you feel you are more comfortable in the school building (finding your way, working your locker etc.) because of the orientation?

- It made me more nervous 1
- It made no difference either way 3
- It made me a little bit more comfortable. 5
- It made me a lot more comfortable. 3

B) Do you feel you are more comfortable with the adults in the building because of the orientation?

- It made me more nervous 0
- It made no difference either way 3
- It made me a little bit more comfortable. 4
- It made me a lot more comfortable. 5

C) Do you feel you are more comfortable with your classes because of the orientation?

- It made me more nervous 1
- It made no difference either way 3
- It made me a little bit more comfortable. 1
- It made me a lot more comfortable. 7

D) Which of the following did you feel were useful activities? Circle all the ones that apply:

- Talking with older students 1
- Doing locks 3
- Learning about the schedule 4
- Touring the school 7
- Doing the cultural activities 1
- Other _____

Do you have any comments you would like to add about the Aboriginal Orientation last year?

- food was good
- It was very helpful

2. Did you attend the grade 7 orientation with your class last spring here at Guildford Park?
yes / no

Yes – 9 No – 1 No Answer - 2 (1 seems to have been a yes that skipped this question)

Answer the following questions only if you answered yes to the above question. Circle the answers that fit you the best. If you did not attend the elementary school grade 7 orientation, go to number 3 on page 3.

A) Do you feel you are more comfortable in the school building (finding your way, working your locker etc.) because of the orientation?

- It made me more nervous 1
- It made no difference either way 2
- It made me a little bit more comfortable. 4
- It made me a lot more comfortable. 3

B) Do you feel you are more comfortable with the adults in the building because of the orientation?

- It made me more nervous 0
- It made no difference either way 3
- It made me a little bit more comfortable. 3

- It made me a lot more comfortable. 4

C) Do you feel you are more comfortable with your classes because of the orientation?

- It made me more nervous 1
- It made no difference either way 1
- It made me a little bit more comfortable. 4
- It made me a lot more comfortable. 4

D) Which of the following did you feel were useful activities? Check all the ones that apply.

- doing locks 5
- meeting with the high school students 2
- touring the school 5
- Meeting some of the staff members 1
- Learning about extracurricular activities 0
- Learning about how the schedule works 2
- Watching a class change 4
- Other _____

Do you have any comments you would like to add about the Elementary School Orientation day? Write your comments below.

- It made me more comfortable when it was the first day

3. Did you attend a summer program here at Guildford Park? yes/ no

yes – 5 No - 7

Answer the following questions only if you answered yes to the above question. Circle the answers that fit you the best. If you did not attend any summer programming at Guildford Park, go to number 4.

A) Do you feel you are more comfortable in the school building (finding your way, working your locker etc.) because of the program?

- It made me more nervous 0
- It made no difference either way 0
- It made me a little bit more comfortable. 1
- It made me a lot more comfortable. 4

B) Do you feel you are more comfortable with the adults in the building because of the program?

- It made me more nervous 0
- It made no difference either way 1
- It made me a little bit more comfortable. 1
- It made me a lot more comfortable. 3

- C) Do you feel you are more comfortable with your classes because of the program?
- It made me more nervous 1
 - It made no difference either way 0
 - It made me a little bit more comfortable. 0
 - It made me a lot more comfortable. 4

D) What do you feel was the most useful part of the summer program?

- meeting the teachers and getting to ask questions
- part where they showed us the math
- the work and locker

E) What do you wish had been included in the summer program?

- some field trips
- nothing I liked it

4. Can you name two adults at Guildford Park (teachers, counsellors, youth workers, principals etc.) who you feel care about you and believe you can succeed?

Yes – 11 No – 0 No Answer - 1

-If yes, who are they?

SESM staff – 6 Gym – 1 Life Skills – 1 AYCW – 3 Admin – 1
 BASES – 3 Counsellor – 1 YCW / SSL - 1

5. Have you made new friendships here at Guildford Park?

Yes – 11 No - 1

6. Have you maintained your old friendships from your elementary school?

Yes – 7 No – 1 Some of them - 3

7. Have you gone to the YES lounge (in the Community building) on your own since school started?

Yes – 7 No - 5

8. Do you know about the breakfast program in the YES lounge?

Yes – 12 No - 0

9. Have you eaten at the breakfast program in the YES lounge?

Yes – 5 No - 7

10. Have you participated in intramurals this year?

Yes – 1 No – 9 Don't know - 2

11. Have you joined any clubs, teams or after school activities based out of the school this year?

Yes – 7 No - 5

12. Have you been into visit the Aboriginal resource room since school started?

Yes – 7 No - 5

13. Have you met the Aboriginal Youth Workers, (names) ?

Yes – 9 No – 1 Maybe - 2

14. Have you met *(name)*, the Aboriginal teacher advocate?

Yes – 10 No - 1

15. Have you gone to after school tutoring?

Why – circle all that apply

- | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | I needed help | 3 |
| <input type="radio"/> | My teacher took me there to get me started | 0 |
| <input type="radio"/> | My friend went with me | 1 |
| <input type="radio"/> | My teacher told me about it | 0 |
| <input type="radio"/> | I saw the tutoring so I went | 1 |
| <input type="radio"/> | I heard about it at the grade 8 assembly | 0 |
| <input type="radio"/> | I was bored | 2 |
| <input type="radio"/> | I needed a space to work on my homework | 3 |
| <input type="radio"/> | Other _____ | |

why not – circle all that apply

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | I don't know about it | 0 |
| <input type="radio"/> | I am too scared to go by myself | 0 |
| <input type="radio"/> | None of my friends will go | 0 |
| <input type="radio"/> | I don't think I need help | 4 |
| <input type="radio"/> | I get homework help somewhere else | 0 |

o Other _____ 2 (no comments)

16. How could we help students find their classes easier at the beginning of the year?

- I don't know
- better schedules and maps
- have older students give a quick tour and answer questions
- homeroom teacher should show them around
- not just maps, show them where things are
- by showing them each room

17. Is there something that you wish you had known before the school year started that would have made September easier for you?

- no - 1
- day one, day two
- only 5-minute class change
- more information about spirit weeks
- about the rotations on Fridays

Return this completed form for a goody bag from the Aboriginal Resource Office!