

2015-2016 AESN Case Study



School: West Heights Community School

District: #75 Mission

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Our focus for this year: We chose to educate students in Halq'eméylem as one avenue to address racism and act as a bridge between cultural communities.

Scanning: Our school is 20% Aboriginal, using our yearly Sense of Belonging surveys (surveying 44 students) and feedback from other students was key in our scanning process. We scanned other students with the four key questions, using Halq'eméylem as the main question for learning. We found that our sense of survey questions was very similar so used them instead. We learned that all students liked the inclusivity of the program and felt pride for being Aboriginal and acceptance and connectivity among the other students.

The Siwal Si'wes department runs mainly by the First Peoples Principles of Learning, our Enhancement Agreement explains our views in detail. As for OECD Principles of learning, we did use this process for this program also. We assessed what our school and students needed and wanted. We reviewed the surveys, discussed them and decided our school needed more Halq'eméylem in our school. This year we implemented it and have it weekly for five of eight of our classes. We are hoping next year to have it in the entire school.

Focus: We chose Aboriginal teachings with a main focus on Halq'eméylem this year to help create cultural awareness, inclusivity, diversity, high levels of student engagement - give positive experiences, promote a safe healthy school environment as well as, bring a sense of unity and belonging which makes transitioning to middle school easier.

Hunch: Aboriginal education has been a primary focus in grade 4 up until now. Many students were writing in the other classes on their surveys that they were not getting much Aboriginal learning in their classrooms. This was a huge concern that this was their perspective. With the new curriculum requirements for all subject areas to teach Aboriginal Education the time for more inclusion is now.

New professional learning: Halq'eméylem was taught to five of our eight classes at West Heights. Some classes were brought into second levels as they received it last year. Aboriginal Cultural Day was also at our school this year where each grade had three Aboriginal presentations. Sto:lo teachings and other Aboriginal teachings were brought in, including Sto:lo Fishing, Aboriginal Archaeological Dig, Cedar Presentation, Slahal, Sto:lo Salish Weaving, Storytelling, Button blanket dolls, Medicine Wheel, Drumming and singing, Spirit Stones, Warrior Shields, and Métis Tuppies. The Aboriginal department was the biggest resource we used for all programs.

To support the learning of our colleagues, the Aboriginal department helped rewrite outdated teachings, provided books and other resources. Also, they provided physical support in being present to help with some of the teachings.

Taking action: We had to make sure teachers were a little flexible on their times, as our Halq'eméylem specialist was often late. The Halq'eméylem teacher would also get lost in teaching as he loved it so much, so we decided to manage his time and let him know when to start and finish so he could make it to the next class on time. We also had back up plans for all presentations in case they got cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.

The Siwal Si'wes Department also reorganized the district library for easy access by all teachers as well as continuously stocked our school library with books we requested.

Checking: Students looked forward to outside presenters we brought into their classrooms. A couple of the teachers expanded on the teachings and did review with the students so they would remember. I saw unity and a sense of belonging happening in the classrooms. Students were highly engaged and you could even hear them singing their Halq'eméylem songs in the hallway. Students felt more connected and you could see the excitement in their eyes when the presenters came into their rooms. We would love to expand this next year to the whole school.

We used our students' involvement as our baseline to see if change was evident and it was. Relationships improved and Aboriginal culture was viewed as important. I believe if I gave everyone that survey that the results would show in the four key questions that matter, that students would feel more accepted and excited with their learning with a goal to learn more.

Reflections/Advice: We learned that a second language is not only beneficial to developing the brain, but also truly is a bridge between cultural communities and brings equality and addresses the problem of racism. We believe this language program as well as continued Aboriginal education with the whole school is very important. One goal is to get Halq'eméylem for the whole school as well as continue a diverse Aboriginal education not only of the Sto:lo territory we are on, but also other Aboriginal teachings from different bands, as our school is very diverse in the areas our students are from.