



2015-2016 AESN TRANSITIONS CASE STUDY

School: Ballenas Secondary

District: #69 Qualicum

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District First Nations Team

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Our focus for this year: We are focusing on creating and fostering learner-responsive school structures to support Aboriginal transitions through grade 10 and beyond.

Scanning: School-wide survey last year – students’ responses helped us shift our focus to “belonging” at Ballenas and what we could do to further support all students’ experiences/sense of belonging. We wanted all students to feel that they had at least two adults in the building who felt they’d be successful, and that they had flexible supports for their learning. This helped us solidify our FLEX learning and LINK structures that are focused on these OECD principles of learning:

- Learners at the Centre (flexible structures to support students)
- Emotions are integral (Social-Emotional Learning focus for LINK)

We met with our District First Nations Team and explored our First Nations, Metis and Inuit Enhancement agreement to get a better sense of the experiences of our Aboriginal students. This scanning is what prompted us to further investigate the experiences of our students at the grade 10 level and what we could do to support them and ultimately their successful transition to grade 11 and beyond (post-secondary).

Focus: Our graduation rates for Aboriginal learners are strong; however, we noted through collaboration with our District First Nations Team that grade 10 is a difficult year and thus decided to focus on what we could do at this stage. We looked particularly at the English curriculum, and through teacher collaboration time, investigated the EFP curriculum at the grade 10 level which will be implemented next year.

We also looked at how school structures can be created to:

- Support students and their sense of belonging
- Provide flexible learning space for all learners
- Provide time for teachers to collaborate as learners

Hunch: Our hunch was that grade 10 is a challenging year for all students for a variety of reasons. We wanted to look at how we could support our Aboriginal learners in being successful in their grade 10 year, thus transitioning to grade 11 and beyond.

New professional learning:

English Department – used teacher collaboration time provided via FLEX LEARNING each Wednesday to connect over English curriculum/ways to incorporate more Aboriginal resources in meaningful ways throughout grades 8 – 10. Also looked at EFP 10-12 curriculum and FNEC

resources to plan an approach to the grade 10 curriculum to support transition of Aboriginal learners. FNEC documents for EFP 10 - 12, our own District Resource Centre, and Strong Nations in Nanaimo were all valuable sources of information and support throughout our exploration.

Staff Collaboration – during flexible learning time, staff has time to collaborate and part of this is whole-staff collaboration at the grade 8-9 level, and at the grade 10-12 level. In both whole-staff collaboration groups, the Circle of Courage was investigated and much discussion and learning took place as to how we will use it as a framework for our LINK classes. During this time, staff also investigated topics linked to Social-Emotional Learning and where we could go next year in terms of our LINK classes and whole-school focus.

Taking action:

- Full or partial implementation of EFP for grade 10 next year
- Continued focus on understanding/implementation of First Peoples Principles of Learning
- FLEX learning – flexible learning time each Wednesday for students to receive extra support, or to connect with a club or interest
- LINK – advisory system with a Circle of Courage focus (Belonging and Independence at Grade 8/9 level, Mastery and Generosity focus at grade 10 – 12 level) and a SEL focus. Students are in multi-age groups and have been put with specific teachers based on areas of interest.

Checking: Students enjoy FLEX learning time and appreciate the spaces that are open and provided for extra support and learning. They also appreciate the clubs that have started based on student interest. We will continue to investigate additional opportunities to provide more flexible options for our students.

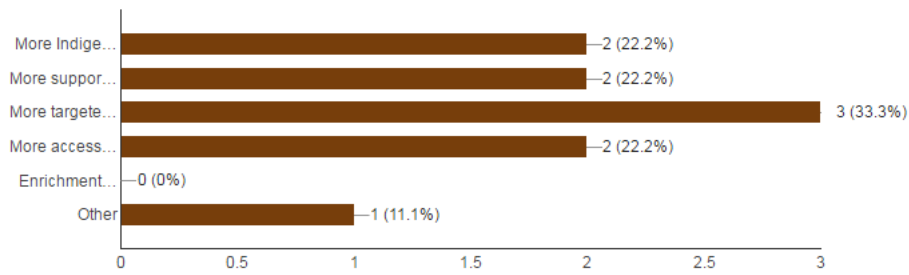
We are currently in the process (June 2016) of surveying all of our students to get feedback to inform directions for LINK next year. We are also surveying students in an attempt to explore how connected they feel to their school at this point in time, after a year's focus on belonging, but we know we have just begun and there is much work to be done. Additionally, as part of this we have included a focus on First Nations that asks our First Nations learners the following questions (results are from Grades 10-12, but all students 8-12 were surveyed)

How would you feel more supported in your learning? (Check all that apply)

- More Indigenous content in the curriculum
- More support integrated into the regular classroom (help from EAs, Special Education teachers, Child & Youth)
- More targeted First Nations support outside of classroom (for example, more availability of a First Nations Li
- More access to tutors through the First Nations Program
- Enrichment opportunities that extend your learning beyond classroom
- Other...

How would you feel more supported in your learning? (Check all that apply)

(9 responses)

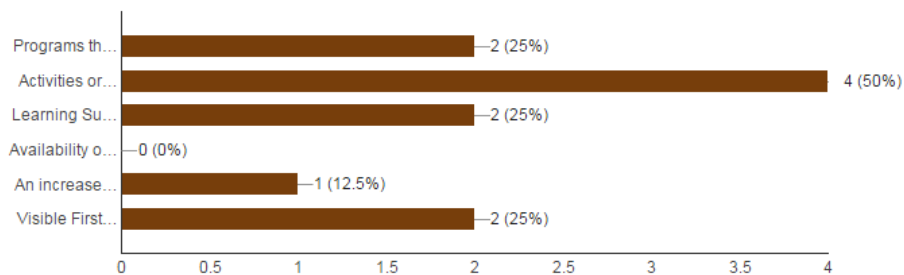


What factors will help ensure you graduate from Ballenas and transition to a post-secondary program?

- Programs that build a sense of belonging (e.g. LINK, Circle of Courage)
- Activities or events that celebrate Indigenous culture
- Learning Supports (see above question for examples)
- Availability of a First Nations Liaison Worker (Loanna) in the First Nations support room
- An increase in First Nations content in the curriculum of most classes
- Visible First Nations language and artifacts at the school

What factors will help ensure you graduate from Ballenas and transition to a post-secondary program?

(8 responses)



Students were also asked for suggestions for building a culture at Ballenas that supports First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students – they suggested “more Aboriginal content in the curriculum to educate people on our culture” and more Aboriginal activities as ideas to start with.

Reflections/Advice: We are grateful that this is a multi-year process as we feel that we have just got started. We recognize that much of what we have accomplished this far has been due to flexible school structures, team collaboration, and an overall inquiry mindset. The Circle of Courage and a Social-Emotional focus has provided us with a strong foundation from which we can build.

We recognize that we have a lot of work ahead of us. We are going to look at a full or partial (significant units) implementation English First Peoples at the grade 10 level next year. We are going to continue our flexible learning structure each Wednesday to provide spaces for students to receive additional support, or to investigate an area of interest/passion. We are going to continue with our LINK advisory system with continued focus on the Circle of Courage and on Social Emotional Learning. We also will be exploring the results from our whole school survey (as discussed above) for meaningful feedback from students to take into consideration for our year ahead.