



## 2015-2016 AESN TRANSITIONS CASE STUDY

**School:** George M Dawson Secondary      **District:** #50 Haida Gwaii

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**Our focus for this year:** The focus this year was on improving the grade 7 transitions to high school.

**Scanning:** We used the four key questions to begin our inquiry. One team member polled the grade 8's and another the senior students.

What we noticed was that the senior students felt very connected to and supported by the adults in the building, whereas the grade 8's felt adrift.

We started to wonder if creating an emotional bond through experiences at or with our school might make a difference for our future students.

**Focus:** We selected this area after a conversation about transitions.

We hoped that in feeling connected to the high school before attending here that students would have a sense of belonging and the increased confidence that comes with belonging.

**Hunch:** Starting high school comes with a lot of changes. You were the oldest, the leaders, now you are on the bottom. You knew all the teachers, had been in their classrooms, now they are all new. You spent most of your day with a teacher who you knew and who knew you, now you have a different teacher for every class and they all have different expectations.

We can't change a lot of these things, but we could introduce the students to our students and staff, we could make them comfortable in this space, and we could expose them to some of the things they can look forward to in high school so they are excited to come and comfortable when they arrive. If the transition still feels difficult at least they might see the people they have already met as allies in the building.

**New professional learning:** Collaboration was the central piece for our learning. The district collaboration program was a helpful resource as it gave time to meet and work with the grade 7 teacher at Tahayghen to plan our transitioning strategies.

**Taking action:** A collaboration partnership with the grade 7 teacher began the transition inquiry. The principals of three schools (one a member of our inquiry team) were made aware of our efforts to ease transitions for the grade 7's and we started considering the inclusion of grade 7's for school-based programs. We have a program called COASt (Cultural, Outdoor, Alternative Studies) that is currently run one day a month and focuses on experiential learning outside of the traditional classroom, and the grade 7's were included in this twice throughout the year. The elementary sports programming was connected to our school which twice hosted play dates (badminton and basketball) for grade 7 students in the district (a first), the grade 7 soccer team also held practices at our field and were coached by a senior student, and students from both Tahayghen Elementary and Port Clements Elementary came to after school floor

hockey. The grade 7's from Tahayghen went mushroom picking with a foods class from GMD, they attended a Haida language feast, and came over to watch episodes of a school based television series. Grade 7's from Port Clements also attended a COAST day, the culminating Field School Day, and the sports play dates.

**Checking:** We won't know until next year if we were truly successful, but the difference in the grade 7's when they came at the beginning of the year and at the end were noticeable. At the beginning they appeared to be shrinking, attempting to fade into the walls, but by the end of the year their body language suggested that they felt more comfortable and confident and this was observed by both our staff and the grade 7 teacher alike.

This year was the first year we made a point of doing this, we are happy with what we have done, but we are also looking forward to continuing to expand these opportunities for next year.

**Reflections/Advice:** The more staff at your school and other schools who are aware of your inquiry, the more chances there are that others will contribute and be supportive. Sports programming was an easy way to have students spend time here before attending the school. If you are already doing something with large numbers adding more doesn't make that much of a difference so it feels manageable. A group of grade 7's who painted a mural during a COAST day have their artwork on the wall in their new school before they will step foot in the building in September.

Challenge your assumptions! We thought the grade 8's would feel comfortable and connected; it is a small town, we know who they are so they must know who we are, they have friends and family here at the school...we were wrong, and now we know that we have to do more to help students make the switch to our school, to become members of our school community.