



2015-2016 AESN TRANSITIONS CASE STUDY

School: Smithers Secondary

District: #54 Bulkley Valley

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Our focus for this year: Our focus area was on successful transitions of learners, specifically Aboriginal learners, from grade 7 to grade 8.

Scanning: We used the four key questions to form a basis for a survey that was given to all grade 8 students, the First Nations 12 class, and the Communications 11-12 class. The survey results were collated and examined. We then used our survey data to create another set of questions that we gave to a focus group of students from a range of grades and backgrounds.

Focus: We chose grade 7 to grade 8 transitions as we wanted to make sure students entering our school were being set up for long term success. Starting at this level also allowed us to strategically look at the transition process as the cohort moved through the school.

Hunch: Overall, we found that our current practices were supporting the grade 7 to grade 8 transition well. We however learned that students want more social time to connect with peers as they enter the high school. We have a hunch that this will be true also for students at the higher grade levels. Our hunch was supported that students crave more connections with peers and teachers.

New professional learning: As a study team, we read “Successful Student Transitions.” We also regularly met as a team to review and collaborate on our individual professional learning and what we were observing as the year progressed. We found the sharing part incredibly beneficial as we got to hear diverse perspectives from teachers and formal leaders who were viewing the same process through different lenses.

Taking action:

What’s going on at SSS?

- I. What we do already with Grade 7 to 8 Transitions:
 - Band – grade 6/7 students from elementary schools converge at the high school for their band course 2 days a week after school.
 - Carolfest is held in SSS gym – combined efforts of all the elementary school choirs and the SSS choirs.
 - Hockey Academy connects some elementary school students to the high school.
 - Counsellors go to elementary schools – talk to classes and answer questions.
 - Counsellors, formal leaders, learning support teacher meet with elementary teachers to gather information used in grade 8 class compositions.
 - Counsellors have individual meetings with parents at SSS for students with IEPs.
 - Grade 7 classes from St. Joseph’s Catholic School come to SSS, set up computer logons, complete a Moodle Survey.
 - Grade 7 Moodle Survey to help inform Grade 7 Orientation Day presentation.

- Grade 7 Orientation Days – three different schools come each day for two days (two blocks – one block to get information from grade 8 group and one block to participate in a scavenger hunt).
- Grade 7 Parent-Student Night (meet in the library or Theatre with counsellors and school leader).
- Course selection and course fair evening – parents can see courses offered at SSS.
- Grade 8 soft start...first half day with homeroom teachers – only three students per adult to get timetable, lock and locker, then quick rotation through timetable to meet teachers and Grade 8 assembly.
- Full class events – hike to Crater Lake/June Lake Picnic.
- Homeroom – multi-grade/stay in the same homeroom throughout high school.

II. What we added this year – INTENTIONAL:

- Conversations have occurred with grade 7 teachers at Walnut Park Elementary and some of the grade 8 teachers at SSS.
- A survey was created to ask students how they feel about transitions. It was administered in grade 8 classes, First Nations Studies 12, and Communications 11/12.
- Survey results were collated and examined.
- A focus group of students was assembled (some volunteered on the survey, some were asked because they were Aboriginal students in senior grades). The focus group met to discuss three questions with regards to high school transitions. What worked well? What did not work well? How could things be improved?
- Grade 7 students from Walnut Park Elementary came when the grade 8's were skiing. They had a class in foods, Physical Education and a Science lesson.
- Moricetown Elementary grade 7 students and teacher came for pizza lunch with the school leader. Computer logons were sorted out and they completed a Moodle Survey.
- Teachers forwarded information regarding connections that were being made with elementary schools.

III. What we added this year – INCIDENTAL:

- SSS grade 8 science teacher coordinated with a grade 6 class to come for three periods to use microscopes.
- SSS Digital Arts, Yearbook teacher invited a grade 7 class to learn about photography and photo editing so that the students could create a calendar for fundraising. There were two sessions where they learned about how to edit their photos to improve the quality and artistry of the photos they had taken during a science nature walk.
- Three teachers coordinated a letter writing campaign for UN in coordination with Muheim Elementary school.
- SSS French 8 teacher coordinated making hockey sweater cookies with grade 5 students from Walnut Park Elementary.
- Worked on outdoor activities in November/December with grade 7's.
- Physical Education 9/10 teacher combined with Walnut Park grade 7 classes.
- SSS Art teacher helped homeschooling families with art assignments and guidance, including grade 7 students.
- Out in School visits. The organization is based in Vancouver and goes out to schools to make presentations and show videos pertaining to LGTTQ and issues.

- Young Women's Project – senior students (girls) working with grade 8 girls. SSS teacher worked with Telkwa Elementary Drama production in Telkwa and at SSS.
- French teacher took grade 8 French class to watch grade 6/7 French Immersion play at Muheim Elementary.

Checking: Overall we were very satisfied with the results and data that we did gather. We added a few things to our transition process that really helped, but perhaps what helped us the most was actually being intentional and aware of all of the things that happened in the school that supported transitions.

Reflections/Advice: As a group, we pulled back several times from taking action to the scanning phase. This is because we wanted to make sure we were going about the scanning process with correct intention rather than whimsically trying things for the sake of it. Being part of the study really focused our group and school. We learned an incredible amount, and look forward to future learning and change next year!