



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: Beaver Creek Elementary

School District: SD#36 Surrey

Inquiry Team Members: Jane Kamimura, Sanyee Wang, Mary Lockie, Tammy Dillon, Karen Greaux, Christy Van Ieperen

Inquiry Team Contact Email: greaux_k@surreyschools.ca

Type of inquiry: AESN

Grade levels: Primary (K - 3), Intermediate (4 - 7)

Curricular area(s): Not applicable

Focus area(s): Community-based learning, transitions from home to school, relationships

In one sentence, what was your focus for the year?

Our focus this year continues to be around Aboriginal transitions through developing relationships.

Scanning: Briefly summarize your scanning process. How did you use the four key questions as part of the scanning process? What did you notice about the experiences of your learners that were most important to your team?

Last year, Beaver Creek Elementary embarked on an inquiry project to make connections with our Aboriginal families. A few years ago, the Aboriginal housing complex in our neighbourhood closed for renovations. Once it reopened, new families moved in who were not only new to our school but also to Surrey. This year, additional families have moved in to the remaining units. We now have over fifty Aboriginal students attending, up from forty, last year. When staff interviewed some of the students using the four questions, it remains evident that there is a disconnect to the school community and little sense of belonging. We are guided by the First People's Principle that learning is holistic, reflexive, experiential and relational and work towards building connectedness and a reciprocal relationship between school and home.

Focus: In a few sentences, explain why you selected this area. What changes were you



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hoping to obtain for your learners?

The staff was encouraged by our work last year – they had seen the positive impact of their work to engage families. Attendance and student engagement have improved. Parents are more willing to ask questions and take part in school activities. Staff recognize that continued care and attention is required to maintain and grow these relationships. We are committed to improved home/school connections as they will benefit the students' academic and social emotional growth.

Hunch: Describe your hunches about the ways in which practices at the school may have been contributing to the experiences of your learners that were of concern to you.

We believe that it's all about developing better, more positive relationships. We have improved some of the ways in which families have contact with us. Students who arrive late (within 15 minutes of the bell) now proceed directly to their classrooms and are welcomed by their teachers. Our Breakfast Club continues to have over 25 students who access the program daily which has positively impacted attendance. The number of families who attend PALS and Ready Set Learn is slowly increasing. We wonder what are the barriers to our families that inhibit greater participation. We wonder about weaving authentic indigenous content/learning throughout sessions rather than having a separate Aboriginal PALS session. We continue to wonder about how we can help our students develop a better sense of belonging at our school through lunch and after school activities.

New professional learning: What new areas of professional learning did you explore? What resources were most helpful? What specific designs did you use to support the learning of your colleagues?

We continue to learn from and be guided by the school district's Aboriginal Helping Teachers. Late last Spring, all Beaver Creek Elementary teachers participated in the BCTF Blanket Exercise at a professional development day. Feedback from staff indicated that they were moved by the experience and gained valuable insights to understand the historical relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of Canada. In the fall, using the backdrop of the wooded area between our school and the adjacent park, the Surrey Nature Centre presented a full day session to all teachers to identify indigenous plants and animals. Several teachers have been working collaboratively to embed Aboriginal perspectives within their classrooms. Staff members have participated in the Little Eaglets workshop offered by the district as well as an in service presented on a new district resource, Seven Sacred Teachings, which will be available for teachers to use in



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their classrooms. We have one staff member who has participated in the UBC MOOC, Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education. At the end of May, we plan to participate in a session facilitated by Takaya Tours. Staff will participate in a traditional opening, listen to legends and learn about ancient knowledge and wisdom of traditional methods used for identifying and harvesting indigenous flora and fauna. Teachers are interested and excited to learn and implement their learning in their classrooms with their students. Two Grade 4 students when asked what their favourite subject at school was stated that they like to learn about their culture because it makes them proud that everyone is learning something about them.

Taking action: Describe strategies you and your team decided on and how your actions worked out.

The focus of our inquiry continues to be Aboriginal transitions through developing relationships in meaningful ways. We looked for opportunities where we could connect with our Aboriginal community in variety of ways – transitioning to school from home and transitioning to Kindergarten.

In January of 2016, Beaver Creek Elementary received funding to provide a breakfast program for our students. This year, the funding source continues and we serve a nutritious breakfast to over 25 students per day. We have noticed that occasionally, parents will join their children at our breakfast table. It is encouraging to see more and more staff members interacting with the children during this time.

In addition, the Attendance Matters Program was established at Beaver Creek in September. An Outreach Worker connects with students with frequent absences to try to support the family with what they need to improve attendance. Phone calls, home visits and an incentive program are all part of the Attendance Matters Program. In many cases, attendance is improving and connections with families are strengthened.

In conjunction with the Attendance Matters program, an after school program funded by the Right to Play organization gives our students the opportunity to participate in sport and play in a supported environment. In addition, the students learn about healthy eating through a diabetes awareness program. The program runs four days per week from 2:30-4:00 and provides a valuable service to families - children get a nutritious snack and are physically active.

This year, Beaver Creek has partnered with the Family Resource Program through Options



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Community Services to provide a preschool every Wednesday morning in our Library. Last Spring, Options approached the school to enquire about the possibility of a community partnership. Their funding through United Way provided a weekly drop in preschool program at Kekinow Aboriginal Housing. Unfortunately, very few Aboriginal families attended the program and they wanted to see if offering the program at the school might be more successful. We decided to begin the program directly following our first bell and targeted families with preschoolers who were dropping off their school aged children. We have a few Aboriginal families who now attend alongside families from many different cultural backgrounds. A benefit to our Aboriginal families is Theresa from FRAFCA (Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre) who works with Options in the preschool program. Theresa is able to connect families to services.

We were fortunate to have an elder come share her culture with her grand children's classes this year. Zelda brought many artifacts and wore her regalia as she told legends and stories of her nation.

The school district has supported Beaver Creek again this year with offering Bannock and Books, an afterschool literacy program for Aboriginal families. We held our first session on January 24 and the second session on April 18. Over fifty children and adults joined us for snacks, cultural activities and stories. Each participant (student and parent) left with a book each time. In April, we were fortunate to invite a Pow Wow dancer to work with the children prior to the program and perform a simple dance for their parents. Theresa from FRAFCA volunteered her time too and many of the Beaver Creek teachers took time to connect with families.

We have purchased many new Aboriginal books for our library. Many of our students are excited to have these added to our collection. One parent has mentioned that her son was excited to sign out Shih-shi's Canoe after the teacher librarian read Shi-shi-etki to the class. Thunder Boy Jr has also been popular with the students since the staff read it to classes as part of our Reading Goal initiative. Additionally, students in some classes often sign out our Aboriginal resources due to exposure from their classroom teachers. Awareness amongst all of our students is helping to build positive home school connections as well.

Checking: Summarize the differences you made. Were they enough? Were you satisfied?

We continue to make slow and steady progress towards our goal to develop more positive relationships with our Aboriginal community. We continue to look for ways to embed



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Aboriginal perspectives within our classrooms and to nurture and recognize the gifts of our Aboriginal families. We base our success on each student and family feeling an increased sense of belonging at Beaver Creek Elementary. At times, we feel frustrated that progress is slow but we recognize that learning involves patience and time.

Reflections/Advice: Finish by sharing what you learned from this inquiry, where you plan to go next, and what advice you would offer other schools with a similar interest.

Creating a sense of belonging for students and parents takes time and a great deal of focused patience. At times, trust between all parties can feel fragile. Staying the course is important for the academic and social emotional growth of our students and well worth the effort.