



Networks of Inquiry and Innovation Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network

2016 - 2017 AESN / NOII Case Study

School Name: City Central Learning Centre

School District: SD#36 Surrey

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Type of inquiry: AESN

Grade levels: Secondary (8 - 12)

Curricular area(s): Not applicable

Focus area(s): Community-based learning, First Peoples Principles of Learning, Inclusion and inclusive instructional strategies, Social and emotional learning

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

We focused on increasing a sense of belonging in our Aboriginal students through building connections with families and making Aboriginal culture more visible in our school.

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?

First we identified our Aboriginal students (almost 50% of student population) and looked at common traits between them. We found that there are common issues that a lot of our Aboriginal students face (trauma, poverty) and that poor attendance was also a common trend. We discussed these issues and realized our regular procedures for dealing with non-attenders were not working so we decided the action plan would focus on increasing a sense of belonging at school with the goal that this would result in increased attendance and engagement. Our next step was identifying at least 1-2 adults at school to be each student's "go-to" person based on who they has the best connections with. Each staff member had a small group of students to give a little extra care and attention to. Our next



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step was identifying a small group of students to attend a culture class after school 2 days a week.

Focus: In a few sentences, explain why you selected this area. What changes were you hoping to obtain for your learners?

We realized that our regular procedures for students who were not attending weren't working with many of our Aboriginal students. Normally we would meet with the students, set up an attendance contract and have a meeting with the parent. Often the first time a parent is asked to come to school it is in a negative context to talk about a problem. Many of our Aboriginal families did not seem to feel comfortable coming in to the schools for meetings. We decided to try and make this first experience at the school a positive one by inviting families in for social events. We also noticed that despite having almost 50% Aboriginal students, Aboriginal culture was not as visible as it should've been. We decided to make this part of our action plan as well, as it could also contribute to an increased sense of belonging. With these two action plans, we increased the sense of belonging in our Aboriginal students with a result of increased attendance, course completions and graduations.

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.

Our hunch was that our practice of dealing with non-attenders created negative first interactions with families and that creating a positive connection early in the year with Aboriginal students and families would make them feel more connected at school and increase their sense of belonging leading to greater attendance and engagement. Our other hunch was that Aboriginal culture was not as visible as it should have been and that increasing Aboriginal content and knowledge and making it more visible would also contribute to an increased sense of belonging.

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 planned to explore ways to increase our Aboriginal students' sense of belonging at school. We did this in two ways:

1. Made positive connections with families
 - a. Monthly family bannock, tea and art socials



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- b. Monthly family cooking club
- c. Aboriginal Open House
- 2. Made Aboriginal culture more visible in the school
 - a. Increased the amount of Aboriginal content and knowledge in the classes
 - b. Twice a week culture classes
 - c. School wide workshops, presentations and celebrations
 - d. Displayed student projects and artwork

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

- 1. Made positive connections with families
We had a high level of engagement for the monthly bannock and tea, cooking clubs, and the open house. The momentum, however, was somewhat lost because of lost time due to snow days and Spring Break. Also, while student participation was good, parent engagement was not as high as we had hoped for.
- 2. Made Aboriginal culture more visible in the school
Aboriginal culture and content is visible and evident throughout the school. Engagement and pride in work has really increased with our students. Work to continue to support teachers in infusing Aboriginal content into course work is ongoing and we continue to collaborate on this goal. Weekly cultural classes have not continued due to staffing conflicts and shortages.

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

As our goal was more focused on a social/emotional outcome, it is difficult to quantify how successful we have been in both our goals. We have much more to do in our quest to build connections with our Aboriginal families.

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.

- The main thing we learned is that we need to find new, improved, and more positive ways of making connections with parents and families of our students. We need to break



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down the stigma that schools represent to many First Nations families. Some new strategies we are working on include:

- A family open house early in the year;
- Aboriginal focus to our Christmas Dinner
- Spring Family dinner
- Mentoring teachers to actively communicate with families in a positive way
- Continue to stress to all staff that it is a shared responsibility of all of us to develop and nurture positive relationships with our first Nations students. The primary relationship must start with the student and the teacher.