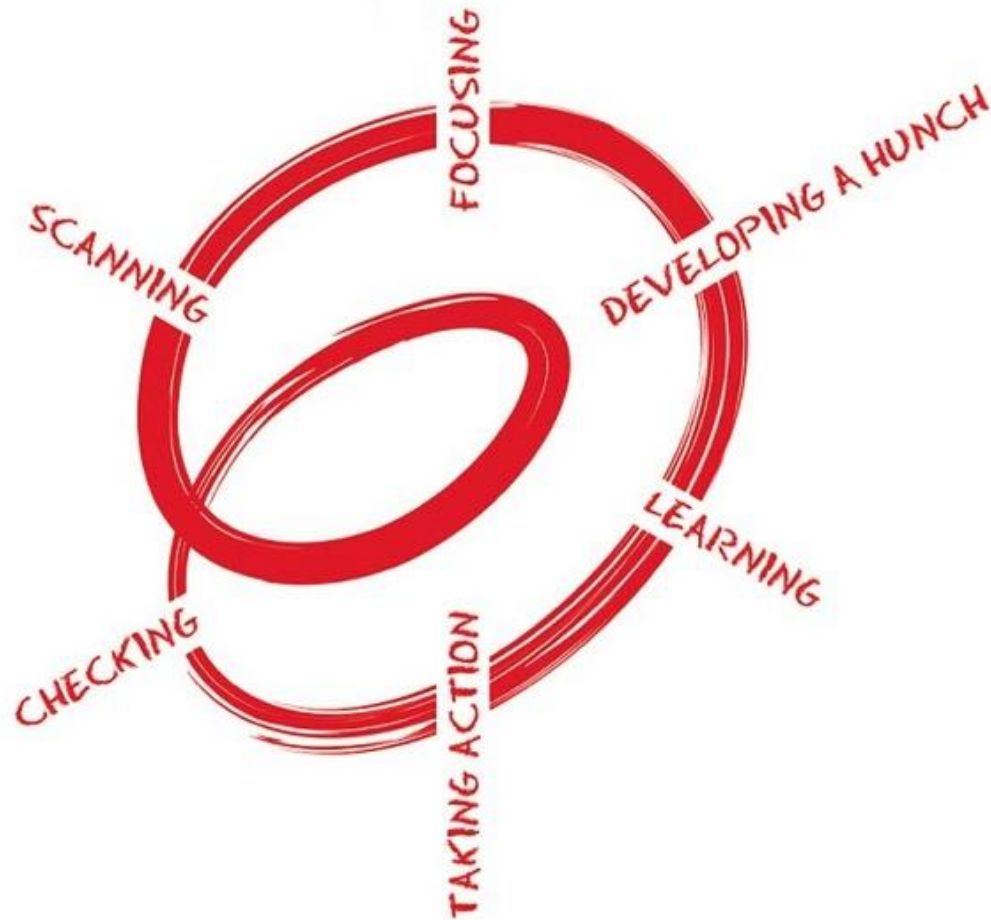




## School District No. 67 (Okanagan Skaha) School Growth Plan



*"Spirals of Inquiry for equity and quality"*  
Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser



School: West Bench Elementary

### **WEST BENCH SCHOOL CONTEXT**

West Bench Elementary hosts 93 students from Kindergarten to grade 5 in five divisions. The West Bench School Community includes students and their families from the West Bench Neighborhood (Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen 'Area F') and the community at Apex Mountain as well as the Penticton Indian Band. The West Bench student body is comprised of students representing culturally diverse backgrounds. The unique nature and needs of our students provides many opportunities to teach respect: respect for self, others, learning and the environment.

We believe strongly in creating and maintaining a culture at West Bench that is welcoming, safe, and a healthy learning environment. Our 17 staff members (teaching, non-enrolling, itinerant and support) are dedicated to making West Bench a high quality school with respect to classroom and school activities. We provide a wide range of learning and growing opportunities for our students.

West Bench is privileged to have a very supportive Parent Advisory Council (PAC). PAC provides financial support to subsidize a number of extra-curricular activities, and curricular and cultural field trips, which enrich daily learning in countless ways.

#### **West Bench Elementary:**

- **values a healthy school climate for all members of the learning community**
- **values the holistic benefits of outdoor learning**
- **values student connectedness and engagement in all areas**
- **values collaborative focus on individual student academic and personal needs**
- **values social-emotional learning as part of a fundamental skill set students need to lead a happy and healthy life**
- **values the cultural heritage of our students and their families**
- **values parental and family support and inclusion**

#### **Inquiry Question:**

For several years, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies were the center of our school wide focus. Our staff has become successful in implementing school wide and classroom SEL strategies as well as support students individually based on specific needs. With this realization, staff shifted the lens of our school wide focus with the intention to move students and the school forward. This new lens is centered on the First Peoples Principles of Learning.

**Our goal(s):**

***How will a school-wide inquiry around the implementation of First Peoples Principles of Learning impact the self-regulation and overall well-being of our students and the learning environment?***

## **Scanning:**

### **Successes**

As a professional learning community, the West Bench staff began the school year with collaborative dialogue around The First Peoples Principles of Learning. While each of the principles are embedded in what we do, common themes emerged resulting in our focus to be on the specific principles:

**Learning is holistic, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)**

**Learning requires exploration of one's identity**

This focus is centered on the indigenous perspectives that everything is inter connected in a meaningful way that impacts one's identity. Based on these principles, the research reminds us of some common traditional beliefs about learning. That where possible, learning should be a part of real-life situations so that the knowledge learned can transfer to the life of the learner.

As such, participants identified a need to explore structures and strategies of **outdoor learning** through the lens of indigenous perspectives in order to better support the well-being of our students connectedness and identity.

### **Challenges**

With this focus in mind the staff engaged in collaborative discussions through the lens of our student demographic. These conversations resulted in a student focus around three questions:

1. Are we developing a healthy relationship between teacher and learner?
2. Are we incorporating the First Peoples Principles of Learning in a meaningful way that supports our students?
3. How would students respond when provided with outdoor learning opportunities?

## **Focusing:**

### **Evidence/Data to support:**

Based on these three questions we conducted two activities:

Activity 1: A student interview was conducted based on Halbert's and Kaser's 'Four Key Questions'. 93 students were interviewed for this survey. Below are the questions and results.

a. Can you name 2 adults in this school who you feel believe in you?

- 97% could name 2 or more adults

b. What do these adults do to make you feel this way?

Student responses were arranged into common themes:

- Teachers Help me
- Encourage me
- Gives us choice
- Say Hi to me in the morning
- Coach Me
- Teachers are nice
- Tell me not to give up
- No Answer

c. Do you like outdoor learning?

- 97% of students were in favor of outdoor learning

d. How do outdoor learning opportunities help with your learning?

Below is a sample of student responses:

- Clears my mind and calms me
- Makes me happier
- You get to explore
- Nature is more fun than the classroom
- I can move around more
- Helps me be connected to nature- not just a building
- Sense of freedom

Activity 2: Staff and PAC completed the Aboriginal Education for All Rubric with the intention of using this tool as a schoolwide self-assessment in regards to the implementation of Aboriginal Education. The results below are the averages based on all assessments that were completed. The color yellow represents 2018 results while blue represents 2017 results if the results were different.



Aboriginal Education for All Rubric – School District No.67 (Okanagan Skaha)

	Beginning 1	Developing 2	Accomplished 3	Exemplary 4
<p><b>Academic Resiliency</b> <i>To increase the educational success of all Aboriginal students.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-staffs are developing an awareness of their Aboriginal student population.</li> <li>-Visual aspects of Aboriginal culture are evident in 1-2 classrooms.</li> <li>-Aboriginal students are minimally engaged in the classroom.</li> <li>-Aboriginal parents/community are minimally invited to school events.</li> <li>-staffs are thinking about tracking their Aboriginal students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- staffs are aware of their vulnerable Aboriginal students.</li> <li>-few examples of Aboriginal art are evident in school entrance, hallways and classrooms.</li> <li>-some Aboriginal students are engaged and understanding the learning materials.</li> <li>-some staff appreciates the importance of strong personal relationships when working with Aboriginal students, parents and/or community.</li> <li>- staffs are discussing tracking their Aboriginal students and gathering data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-staffs promote additional support of their vulnerable Aboriginal students.</li> <li>-Aboriginal art is evident in school entrance, hallways and classrooms.</li> <li>-some Aboriginal students understand and incorporate the learning materials in their lives.</li> <li>-many staff appreciates the importance of strong personal relationships when working with Aboriginal students, their parents and community.</li> <li>-staffs include a specific Aboriginal objective or target which could include a literacy and/or numeracy goal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-staffs support their most vulnerable Aboriginal students.</li> <li>-noticeable Aboriginal presence in school entrance, hallways and classrooms.</li> <li>-all Aboriginal students are engaged and taking pride in their learning.</li> <li>-all staff appreciates the importance of strong personal relationships when working with Aboriginal students, their parents and community.</li> <li>-staffs include and monitor specific Aboriginal objective or target which could include a literacy and/or numeracy goal.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cultural Perspective</b> <i>To raise awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history, traditions, and culture for all students and staff in the Okanagan Skaha School District.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-collecting resources and information focused on Aboriginal culture that can be connected to the prescribed learning outcomes.</li> <li>-thinking about inviting Aboriginal role models into the school.</li> <li>-thinking about Aboriginal pedagogy.</li> <li>-minimal authentic resources in schools and libraries and/or outdated resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-direct instruction on anti-racism education and deconstructing biases.</li> <li>-a few Aboriginal role models are invited into the school.</li> <li>-learning about Aboriginal pedagogy.</li> <li>-some authentic resources in schools and libraries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-presence of Aboriginal culture is visual and integral to lesson and activities.</li> <li>-some Aboriginal role models are invited into the school throughout the year.</li> <li>-talking about Aboriginal pedagogy and incorporating it into practice.</li> <li>-several authentic Aboriginal resources in schools and libraries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Aboriginal cultural knowledge is respected and valued, and is taught in any PLO not just ones with specific Aboriginal content.</li> <li>-community role models are involved in classroom practice.</li> <li>-when we are no longer talking about Aboriginal pedagogy—it's just what we do.</li> <li>-libraries have been culled for stereotypical representation and resources replaced with authentic Aboriginal resources.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relationships</b> <i>To nurture and foster relationships between the Okanagan Skaha School District and Aboriginal families, communities, and organizations.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-PAC is developing some understanding of Aboriginal issues.</li> <li>-no direct Aboriginal community involvement in school.</li> <li>-teacher directed Aboriginal themed field trip with minimal involvement with community.</li> <li>-they know the location of a First Nations community.</li> <li>-very little knowledge of community agencies or support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-PAC have some awareness of Aboriginal issues.</li> <li>-Aboriginal parents invited to supervise on a field trip.</li> <li>-Aboriginal presentations in 1-2 classrooms with local resource people.</li> <li>-staff have some Aboriginal knowledge, but not firsthand knowledge of local communities.</li> <li>-community organizations have been mentioned in SBT's.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Aboriginal people are encouraged to attend PAC.</li> <li>-Aboriginal parents will come on field trips.</li> <li>-one social/cultural event in the school where Aboriginal parents will participate.</li> <li>-one time visit by the staff in the community.</li> <li>-community organizations have been contacted following SBT's.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Aboriginal parents actively involved in the PAC and SPC.</li> <li>-Aboriginal parents taking leadership roles in field trips.</li> <li>-Aboriginal theme - school wide over a period of time.</li> <li>-Parents are cultural resource in schools.</li> <li>-Parent information session held in FN community.</li> <li>-community organizations are regularly used to support students and families.</li> </ul>
<p><b>School Connectedness</b> <i>To increase Aboriginal student's sense of belonging, including sense of place, personal and cultural identity, and self-esteem in a caring, safe and inclusive environment.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-discussion about having a cultural event in the school.</li> <li>-learning about the local culture from book and resources.</li> <li>-using Aboriginal resources they already have in their school.</li> <li>-beginning awareness that there are cultural events in their community open for everyone to attend.</li> <li>- principals thinking about acknowledging the territory at school events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-one cultural event per year.</li> <li>-staffs attend a workshop to learn about Aboriginal history, knowledge and of our shared history.</li> <li>-seeking out already created curriculum related to Aboriginal.</li> <li>-having a representative from the school attending one cultural event.</li> <li>-principals discussing acknowledging the territory at school events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-some classrooms have language and culture.</li> <li>-teachers aware of the local culture/protocols so they can integrate into teaching.</li> <li>-developing a curriculum by working together with teachers and cultural resource people.</li> <li>-some teachers attending two cultural events per year.</li> <li>-some schools have an Elder in Residence.</li> <li>-Sometimes acknowledgement of the territory is done.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-on-going cultural events.</li> <li>-culture and/or language in each grade across and throughout the school.</li> <li>-all staff members have clear understanding and respect of the local culture.</li> <li>-staffs attending community events.</li> <li>-dual Okanagan language signs in schools.</li> <li>-Acknowledgment of the territory at school events is a given.</li> </ul>

## **Key Learnings:**

Participants have concluded that the power of implementing a school wide approach with a First Peoples Principles of Learning framework that is supplemented with outdoor learning opportunities is paramount to establishing a healthy learning environment. Based on the data from the scanning process the participants concluded that there is a strong sense of school connectedness in our students and, as a school, a lot of focus and effort by all staff has resulted in meaningful implementation of First Peoples Principles of Learning. While these strengths have been recognized and celebrated, the participants also noted that there is still a lot of work to be done to enhance our student-school connectedness as well as work towards incorporating indigenous perspectives across all curriculum. Participants feel that meeting the needs of students in these two areas will directly impact student self-regulation, learning environments and the overall well-being of students.

## **Developing a Hunch:**

The need for self-regulation in students is constant and carries over across all learning environments they face throughout the day. From P.E., to core classes to the playground, students' environment is ever changing and with it, environmental factors that students need to adjust to. In addition, students are faced with navigating stressors at home as well. For many students in our demographic, these stressors can compound and become overwhelming which impacts their day to day learning and well-being. As an inquiry group, participants' acknowledge the need for a schoolwide approach to social emotional learning through outdoor learning opportunities. By connecting this approach to the First Peoples Principles of Learning students will benefit from land based, holistic connections as well as the exploration of their identity. The work over the past few years around social emotional learning has created a common language in this school and students are equipped with various strategies they can use to help self-regulate. Participants would like to incorporate these strategies across all aspects of the curriculum and school settings to even better equip our students with self-regulation skills.

## **New Professional Learning:**

- Two staff members attended FNEESC conference in Fall 2017
- Flex Funds were used to release staff for collaborative planning, dialogue, and study
- Ongoing collaboration at monthly staff meetings
- Relationship has been established with En'owkin Center to co plan hands on learning opportunities for our students
- Informal and formal teacher meetings were held in order to plan and reflect
- Three staff members participated in Inquiry Learning Series led by Leyton Schnellert
- One staff members participated in the Aboriginal Book Club series
- Class Reviews were conducted in September
- Three staff members were part of the district outdoor kindergarten work group
- One staff member was a member of a network of librarians focusing on library commons

## **Taking Action:**

- Outdoor Kindergarten: Over the course of the year our Kindergarten teacher developed and implemented an outdoor program where her class went outside every day (in addition to regular scheduled break times) to partake in curricular exercises while utilizing the outdoor setting. Reflections from this program noted increased interest and participation among students towards learning as well as a decrease in behaviors.
- Place Conscious Inquiry: Members of West Bench staff partook in an inquiry led by Leyton Schnellert
- Reflecting on and analyzing the MDI data
- Intermediate class was involved in an outdoor learning inquiry project
- Students organized a schoolwide 'Feast' during our garden harvest
- Continued relationship with En'owkin center in various land based projects.
- School wide activity where students identified and removed invasive species around the school yard in the fall and planted indigenous species in the spring.
- Cross Country Skiing program (school wide) with Spirit North
- Staff will continue to collaborate and reflect around the implementation of the new curriculum with a focus on the competency around student identity.
- Social Emotional Learning Strategies: staff will continue the use of Mind Up, Core Practice and Zones of Regulation curriculum
- Aboriginal Education for All: continue to build on experiencing cultural activities
- Okanagan Language Lessons for all students
- Schoolyard Enhancement Project: to support many of the initiatives the school is moving forward with, this project includes: creation of a school garden, installing an outdoor classroom, revitalizing our outdoor sports court, and revitalizing our indigenous planting circle.

- Community Summer Garden Project
- School wide planting day of traditional species around our school yard
- Weekly school wide hikes
- Wild Life camera project
- Year round recycling and composting projects
- Community experts in for invasive plants, local animals and composting

### **Check:**

Measures for next year:

- ongoing reflections at monthly staff meetings
- utilizing the MDI data
- look at student achievement data
- continue to provide students with outdoor learning opportunities
- look at number of office referrals (rate, frequency)
- student interviews
- self-assessment on Aboriginal Education For All Rubric
- look at school data for progress in the competency around student identity

### **Communication Strategies:**

- **School goals, vision and student data are an ongoing topic for discussion at monthly PAC meetings**
- **Continued use of school website, newsletters and social media**

### **Parental/Community Involvement:**

- **Parent Evening Occurred in September 2017**
- **Parents are invited into our school for various events and school functions**
- **Parental and family participation in joint programs such as our school garden.**
- **Parents were invited to an outdoor kindergarten lesson in May as part of kindergarten transition.**
- **Members of PAC took part in Aboriginal Education for all Rubric Survey**



### **Connection to the District Goals:**

- **Aligns with district goals around student achievement in literacy**
- **Aligns with district goals around school completion**
- **Aligns with district vision around the guiding principles for developing and implementing the RTI Framework:**
  - **Instruction – central to the success of RTI is high quality classroom core instruction and management**
  - **Responsive Teaching & Differentiation – focus on differentiating instruction for struggling students**
  - **Collaboration – dynamic, positive, productive partnerships among professionals to establish common goals**
  - **Expertise – importance of teacher expertise (both Classroom and Learning Support Teachers) in addressing the needs of student**

### **Connection to the 7 Principles of Learning:**

- 1. Learners at the center**
  - **Activities are focused on cognition and growth**
  - **Working towards improving self-regulation**
  - **Outdoor activities centered around exploration and inquiry**
  
- 2. Social nature of learning**
  - **Teacher Collaboration**
  - **Activities include cross grade interactions**
  - **Inquiry based model**
  - **School wide activities**
  
- 3. Emotions are integral to learning**
  - **Focus on Social Emotional Learning**
  - **Growth Mindset**
  - **Connection to the land**
  
- 4. Recognizing individual differences**
  - **Partake in various cultural programs**
  - **Focuses on Core Competency around student Identity**
  - **Incorporates First Peoples Principles of Learning**
  
- 5. Stretching all students**
  - **Outdoor Kindergarten Program**
  - **Place Conscious Learning Strategies**
  - **Implementing new curriculum**
  
- 6. Assessment for learning**
  - **Reflective practices**

- **Ongoing feedback**
- **Data driven goals**
- **Assessment for learning practices embedded in teaching strategies**

**7. Building horizontal connections**

- **Cross curricular/multi age level activities**
- **Schoolyard Enhancement project creates opportunities for cross curricular activities**
- **Outdoor Kindergarten program**
- **Place Conscious learning activities**