



School District No. 67 Aboriginal Education

110 Green Avenue W.
Penticton, BC V2A 3T1
Vice Principal: Kathy Pierre

Aboriginal Education School Improvement Plan (2009-10)

Aboriginal Education Context:

School District No. 67 Aboriginal Education Program provides service to three secondary schools, four middle schools and 11 elementary schools in Penticton, Summerland, Naramata and Kaleden. The aboriginal education school staff consists of a Vice Principal, five Teachers, one Counselor, and six Support Workers who work across the district to deliver services to students and schools.

Our enrolment as of September 30, 2009 includes 261 secondary, 192 middle and 182 elementary students for a total of 635 aboriginal students. School District No. 67's aboriginal population consists of on-reserve first nation students coming from the Penticton Indian Band (approximately 1/3 of the students), Metis, non-status and off-reserve first nations.

We have a Local Education Agreement (L.E.A.) with the Penticton Indian Band that was signed in September, 2008. In addition, we are currently in the fourth year of our E.A. Our E.A. focuses on four goal areas which are intended to improve overall academic achievement. The goals focus on improving aboriginal student success in literacy and numeracy, improving dogwood graduation rates; improving school transition rates; and enhancing opportunities for aboriginal cultural enrichment, visibility and history in our schools.

INQUIRY QUESTION

How does increasing the awareness, visibility and appreciation of aboriginal history and culture by both the aboriginal and general population of students affect aboriginal students' sense of belonging and engagement in school?

RATIONALE: What evidence compelled us to ask this question?

Our staff developed this question because we recognize that we need to develop a plan and implement strategies to increase engagement and a sense of belonging (identity) for our aboriginal students.

Historically, School District No. 67 data reflects that our aboriginal students have higher absenteeism at all levels and significantly lower graduation and school transition rates than the general student population. Although the education system has made significant progress towards improving academic achievement for aboriginal students, it is apparent that more work needs to be done before social equity is realized.

In 2009, the aboriginal students' six year dogwood completion rate for School District No. 67 was 48.2%. One of our E.A. targets indicated that we are aiming to improve our six year dogwood completion rate to 65% by June 2010 for aboriginal learners. Based on the trends we are experiencing, it is apparent that we will not successfully meet the established target this year.

The Aboriginal Education school staff attended a workshop with Dr. Martin Brokenleg in August, 2009. In addition, we conducted a book study using Dr. Brokenleg's book, *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*. Dr. Martin Brokenleg emphasizes the importance of creating a "reclaiming environment" where individuals can experience "belonging in a supportive community, rather than being lost in a depersonalized bureaucracy" (pg. 4). He states, "To reclaim isto restore value to something that has been devalued" (pg. 3).

Dr. Martin Brokenleg inspired us to focus our attention on implementing strategies to increase a sense of belonging, identity and ownership for our aboriginal student population so that we can create supportive, learning environments that cultivate educational values, develop relevance in the curriculum delivered in our classrooms and restore pride for our aboriginal students as visible and important members in school and society. We recognize that we need to promote and implement strategies from K-12 with the support and assistance of all schools across the district, our local aboriginal partner groups and other community agencies.

ACTION PLAN

OBJECTIVES: Specific Steps to answer our question OR More specific questions?

1. ***Implement strategies to increase student engagement.***
2. ***Increase a sense of belonging and aboriginal visibility in our schools*** by providing opportunities for all students to learn about aboriginal culture and history.
3. ***Build capacity*** for improving communication and developing relationships between home, school, and the aboriginal community. It is important to build capacity within schools with teachers and administrators to ensure success with the strategies we are implementing.

STRUCTURES AND STRATEGIES: For all students and our most vulnerable learners.

A) Increase a Sense of Belonging and Aboriginal Visibility:

1. ***Ongoing Cultural Workshops, Fieldtrips and Events:***
Students participate in ongoing cultural activities and events such as: root and food gathering fieldtrips, Pow Wow dance workshops, Pow Wow Regalia workshops, drumming workshops, aboriginal cultural events, aboriginal guest speakers, career fairs, etc.,
2. ***Honoring Our Families Program:***
Eight aboriginal families from West Bench School participated in and completed an eight week family program where parents support each other, develop community and school support networks so they can advocate for their children and develop positive relationships between school and community.
3. ***Annual Community and School Celebrations:***
Aboriginal Education Graduation and Elementary Student Recognition Events are hosted annually to recognize the success of aboriginal students across the district. Parents, families, community members, teachers, administrators, Aboriginal Education staff, representatives from School District No. 67 School Trustees and the aboriginal partner groups attend.

4. *Our Elders Are Watching Program:*

We have launched an Elders Program at Skaha Lake Middle School and Princess Margaret Secondary. Vera Gabriel, a respected elder from the Penticton Indian Band, goes to Skaha Lake Middle School four days/week for approximately four hours per day to work with students. As well, Judy George, a respected elder from Penticton Indian Band, has been at Princess Margaret Secondary School several times to work with aboriginal students.

5. *Building Cultural Bridges Program:*

A cultural event with seven hands-on cultural stations that are implemented at elementary schools to educate grade 4 and 5 students about various aspects of aboriginal culture in Canada. They include stations such as Metis dance and culture, traditional foods and traditional dwellings of the Okanagan First Nation, etc.,

6. *Annual School Wide Cultural Presentation:* (Secondary, Middle and Elementary):

Every year the Aboriginal Program puts on a district wide cultural event. This year we celebrated aboriginal dance and song by hosting an educational Pow Wow at Princess Margaret Secondary School. Students from grade 4 to 12 were invited to observe and participate. Schools prepared students for the events by teaching lessons developed by the Aboriginal Program staff.

B) Increase Student Engagement:

1. *Aboriginal Content Courses at the Secondary Level:*

BC First Nations Studies 12 and First Nations Futures are offered at two of our secondary schools. BC First Nations Studies is in its second year at Penticton Secondary. Aboriginal and non-aboriginal students are enrolled in the course. First Nations Futures is in its third year at Princess Margaret Secondary targeting at-risk female students (aboriginal) from grade 9-12.

2. *AESN Inquiry → Aboriginal Novel Study at Secondary Level:*

We purchased three complete class sets of aboriginal novels at the secondary level and launched an aboriginal novel project at Princess Margaret and Penticton Secondary School. English 9 & 10 classes participated in the project by reading the novels and providing feedback through surveys so we could determine the personal connections, level of interest and deeper learning experienced by participating students. In general, the survey revealed that students enjoyed the novel they read; they could personally relate to some of issues presented in the novels; and they are open to reading more aboriginal novels in school.

3. *Early Literacy Intervention (using aboriginal books):*

Bonny Lynn Donovan, our Early Literacy Intervention Teacher, provides opportunities for students to make cultural connections by supplying students with aboriginal literature during their early literacy intervention cycle. The Aboriginal Early Literacy Program targets aboriginal students who are non-readers from grade 1-3. Students go through a 16-22 week intensive, reading intervention cycle with Ms. Donovan.

4. *Early Phonemic Awareness (using aboriginal content):*

Bonny Lynn Donovan utilizes aboriginal content stories, poems and rhymes when possible to deliver an early phonemic awareness program to Kindergarten students at West Bench Elementary School.

5. Ongoing academic and cultural support for aboriginal students at all levels:

We provide various levels of support at all schools within School District No. 67. We have aboriginal support rooms at Skaha Lake Middle, Princess Margaret Secondary and Penticton Secondary Schools.

6. Ongoing social and emotional support for aboriginal students with Ab Ed Counselor and staff:

Rhea Dupuis, the Aboriginal Counselor for School District No. 67, provides ongoing emotional support for aboriginal students and their families. We recognize that emotional stress is a potential barrier to student success at the middle and secondary levels.

ASSESSMENT PROCESS & TOOLS: What will we use to measure our success?

We have collected and analyzed the following School District No. 67 data to determine our at-risk students and schools:

1. Attendance (elementary, middle, secondary)
2. The Six Year Dogwood Completion Rate Data
3. Data from the "How Are We Doing Report"
4. FSA and DMA District Data

Next year, we will generate data to show the following:

1. Number of aboriginal cultural events and activities implemented in schools across the district and the number of aboriginal students and non-aboriginal participants.
2. Aboriginal student/parent survey to determine attitudes, beliefs and thoughts regarding belonging, attendance and engagement in school.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: How will we increase our capacity and collaboration?

1. Dr. Martin Brokenleg Keynote address:

In August 2009, Dr. Martin Brokenleg was the keynote presenter at the District Pro D. His message emphasized there is hope and we can reclaim youth at-risk by helping students develop a healthy sense of belonging and connection to the world they live in.

2. Dr. Martin Brokenleg Book Club - "Reclaiming Youth At Risk":

During the 2008-09 school year, the aboriginal education staff did a book study using *Reclaiming Youth at-Risk*. Deep discussions resulted. As a staff, we recognized our role in developing good relationships with students and their families and the significance of helping students develop a positive sense of belonging in our schools.

3. Webinar - "Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth - A Toolkit for Service Providers":

The Aboriginal Education Staff at the middle and secondary level attended weekly webinars (Fall 2009) to explore ways to build effective partnerships, integrate cultural identity, engage youth and maintain effective partnerships. Also, representatives from aboriginal community partner groups, school administrators, teachers and school counselors from across the district participated.

4. School District No. 67 and Penticton Indian Band Partnership:

Regularly scheduled meetings using a school based team model are held on a monthly basis to discuss initiatives being implemented in schools and the successes that have resulted. In addition, we discuss youth at-risk and strategize how to support them and their families. The partnership group is composed of administrators from West Bench Elementary, Skaha Lake Middle School, Princess Margaret Secondary, School District No. 67 Aboriginal Education Teachers and Vice Principal, and the Penticton Indian Band Social Development Committee.

RESOURCES: What do we currently have and what do we need?

1. *Reclaiming Youth at-Risk - Our Hope for the Future* by Larry K. Brendtro, Dr. Martin Brokenleg and Steve Van Bockern.
2. *Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth - A Toolkit for Service Providers* by Claire V. Crooks, Debbie Chiodo and Darren Thomas.
3. Vera Gabriel - Penticton Indian Band Elder.
4. Anna Tonasket - Restorative Justice Coordinator for South Okanagan Restorative Justice Program.
5. Bruce Manuel - Restorative Justice Coordinator for South Okanagan Restorative Justice Program.
6. Lauren Terbasket - Director of Education for the En'owkin Centre.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT: How parents will become partners in our efforts?

We are striving to develop meaningful relationships with parents and effective partnerships with our aboriginal partner groups to assist us in supporting aboriginal students and their families in the following ways:

- ◆ By meeting on a monthly basis with Penticton Indian Band Social Development Committee to determine support strategies at the community level.
- ◆ By inviting and including parents in school meetings involving their children at all levels.
- ◆ By inviting parents to participate in cultural events and social events hosted in schools.
- ◆ By establishing and maintaining ongoing contact with parents and aboriginal community agencies regarding student progress, successes and concerns.

EVIDENCE

KEY FINDINGS: What did we find out?

- A) Attendance data reveals the aboriginal student population that is potentially at-risk because of high absenteeism at each level:
1. Aboriginal student attendance (**Elementary level**):
 - a. Overall → 30% (63/207) were absent more than 15 days this year.
 - b. Overall → 15% (29/207) were late more than 15 days this year.

- c. West Bench, Queen's Park and Carmi Elementary Schools have the highest absenteeism and they make up 41% of the aboriginal student population at the elementary level:

- i. West Bench → 44% (14/32) were absent more than 15 days this year.
- ii. Queen's Park → 53% (19/36) were absent more than 15 days this year.
- iii. Carmi → 41% (7/17) were absent more than 15 days this year.

2. Aboriginal Student Attendance (**Middle School Level**):

- a. Overall → 45% were absent more than 16 days this year.
- b. Overall → 21% were late in the morning more than 15 days this year.
- c. Skaha Lake Middle School and KVR have the highest absenteeism at the middle school level. They make up 68% (131/192) of the aboriginal student population at the middle school level:

- i. Skaha Lake Middle School → 51% (32/63) were absent more than 16 days this year.
- ii. KVR → 46% (31/68) were absent more than 16 days this year.

3. Aboriginal Student Attendance (**Secondary Level**):

- a. Overall → 52% (121/234) missed more than 75 classes (blocks) this year.
- b. Overall → 35% (82/232) were absent more than 15 days this year.
- c. The data reveals that all three secondary schools have a high number of aboriginal students missing more than 75 classes this year. However, Princess Margaret Secondary has the highest absenteeism and highest number of missed classes (Blocks):

i. Missed Classes (over 75 classes):

1. Penticton Secondary → 42% (48/115)
2. Summerland Secondary → 46% (13/28)
3. Princess Margaret Secondary → 66% (60/91)

ii. Over 15 days absent:

1. Princess Margaret Secondary → 49% (45/91)
2. Penticton Secondary → 9% (33/113)

B) Data provided by the "How Are We Doing Report" indicates that the aboriginal student "Six Year Completion Rate" is significantly lower than the general population. In the past two years it has been below 50%.

C) FSA Data reveals:

- a. Grade 4 → 40% are "Not Yet Meeting" in reading. 40% are "Not Yet Meeting" in math (2008-09).
- b. Grade 7 → 25% are "Not Yet Meeting" in reading, and 12% are unknown. 43% are "Not Yet Meeting" in math, and 19% are unknown (2008-09).

D) Diagnostic Math Assessment reveals:

- a. Grade 5 → 45% are "Not Yet Meeting" in math (June 2010).
- b. Grade 8 → 56% are "Not Yet Meeting" in math (June 2010).

NARRATIVE: What successes and/or challenges are not reflected in the data?

The attendance data demonstrates that attendance is a big concern for many aboriginal students at several schools from elementary to secondary. District wide data reflects that we have a great deal of work to do to support aboriginal students. However, for this year we have focused our attention on identifying areas of concern. Next year we will focus on strategies to improve student engagement (attendance) and student sense of belonging.

REFLECTIONS: What did we learn? How did it make a difference?

We recognize that we are faced with many complex issues in trying to improve a sense of belonging and increased engagement for aboriginal students. The attendance data indicates there are a large number of students who miss excessive amounts of school at all levels. In particular, there are many students at the secondary level who are skipping an excessive number of classes per school year; thus, indicating that they are struggling to stay connected to school and we are struggling to keep them motivated at the secondary school level. A high rate of absenteeism at the elementary and middle school level compounded with students coming in late in the morning at the middle school level is a big concern that requires the attention of schools and the Aboriginal Education Program staff to develop focused strategies to remedy the fact that students are missing many of their core subjects; thus impacting their academic success.

FUTURE PLANNING: Where do we go from here?

To increase a sense of belonging for our aboriginal students, their families and the aboriginal community we intend to focus more attention on the following:

- ◆ Expand Elders program to involve West Bench, Skaha Lake Middle and Princess Margaret Secondary.
- ◆ Increase visibility in schools in the following ways:
 - Develop signage in the Okanagan Language in schools.
 - Ask schools to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Okanagan First Nation at events.
 - Develop areas for aboriginal art such as story poles and aboriginal murals created by aboriginal students at the middle and secondary level.
 - Create areas for aboriginal students to showcase cultural artwork and crafts.
 - Increase opportunities for Elders and others as aboriginal resource people in schools.
 - Expand our “Building Cultural Bridges Program” to include the middle school level.
 - Continue to offer district wide aboriginal events and activities such as the Pow Wow and aboriginal theatrical performances annually.
 - Expand cultural workshop opportunities at schools (with higher rates of absenteeism at all levels) to target at-risk students with the hope of motivating and improving attendance.
 - Expand the Aboriginal Novel Project at the secondary level by encouraging English 9 and 10 teachers to include at least one aboriginal novel in their English course.

- ◆ Develop and implement strategies to increase parental and aboriginal community involvement in the following ways:
 - Continue the Honoring Our Families Program at West Bench School every second year.
 - Expand the “Honoring Our Families Program” concept to the middle school level (Skaha Lake Middle School).
 - Develop and implement a “community action plan” using the school based team model to improve accountability and networking between school and community agencies (School District No. 67 and Penticton Indian Band Partnership work group).
 - Expand home/school/community networking by having the schools go to the aboriginal community and utilizing community events such as the Penticton Indian Band S & S Café to deliver information to parents and families regarding school initiatives, etc. (For example, Full Day Kindergarten Programs, Report Cards, etc.,)
 - Invite parents to participate in informational evenings in schools at all levels (i.e. post secondary, Metis informational sessions, etc.,)
 - Expand school and community networking by developing and maintaining partnerships with the Penticton Indian Band and the En’owkin Centre and the Ooknakane Friendship Centre when possible.