

School District #53 – Okanagan Similkameen

Enhancing Student Learning – YouLearn.ca Staff Inquiry

2024-25

QUESTION – How do we effectively teach executive functioning strategies across grade levels?

SCAN - What is going on for our learners?

YouLearn.ca is School District #53's Online Learning (OL) and Continuing Education (CE) School. We provide online learning options to school age and adult learners. We offer distinct K-6, 7-9, 10-12, adult, and Inclusion programs. We pride ourselves in personalizing programs for our students in partnership with our parents/guardians and local brick-and-mortar schools. We also provide graduation and upgrade programs for the Okanagan Correctional Centre (OCC).

As of September 30, 2024, we have 85 local, school-age, school of record students: 12 K-6s, 17 8-9s, 46 10-12s, and 10 recent adult non-grads on IEPs. In addition, we have 70 local, adult school of record students: 6 gap year young adults, 41 non-graduated adults, and 13 upgrading graduated adults. At OCC, we have 26 students: 22 non-graduated adults and 4 graduated upgrading adults.

Five years ago, we started an Inclusion Program to support our district's most complex and vulnerable students. Currently, we support 49 Inclusion students: 39 school-age and 10 recent adult non-graduates on the adult graduation program. This represents 58% of our school-age students.

Inside YouLearn, we have 41 self-identified, school of record Indigenous students: 9 non-graduated adults, 1 upgrading graduate, and 31 school-age students, which represents roughly 36% of our total school-age students currently being tracked and supported. At OCC, 14/26, or 54% self-identify as Indigenous.

Adapting to meet the needs of our diverse learners has been challenging. For the past few years, staff have been exploring ways to increase student engagement through a variety of initiatives from implementing a teacher mentorship program to designing blended and synchronous learning opportunities to complement our online and home learning programs. Each has improved student engagement; however, a common observation across our school was uncovered last year: lagging executive functioning skills appear to be interfering with student engagement and success more than any other single issue.

Building on this idea and last year's inquiry, teachers intend to return to scanning to learn more about the role executive functioning plays in student success and how best to intervene with instruction to improve students' executive functioning skills.

Specifically, staff will:

- Collect insights from student, parents, and interagency workers on the need for, and role of, executive functioning skills for YouLearn students and online/home learners.
- Review 2023-24 Communication Logs for signs/clues related to executive functioning.
- Review 2023-24 Rounds Notes and quantify incidents where executive functioning skills are mentioned.
- Review IEPs for language, goals, and strategies directly related to executive functioning skills such as time management, and task initiation.
- Review results of the new Online Student Learning Survey.
- Conduct a new round of empathy interviews this year focused on Executive Functioning/Core Competency development that might uncover equity issues.

FOCUS - What will have the biggest impact?

Staff believe that directly teaching executive functioning and related Core Competency skills are areas where they will be most able to positively impact student learning. If students can be effectively exposed to meaningful strategies and be given the time to self-reflect on their learning: engagement, focus, course completion, and student success will increase.

Staff	Preliminary Executive Functioning Focus Ideas
	We need to directly teach executive functioning.
	Time management for K-6's is extremely important.
	We need to consider tying EF into our Career Education courses along with the requirement of goal setting and Core Competency self-assessments.
	We need to continue to use EF strategies to help students self-assess and evaluate their progress; as well, we need to improve how we inventory and manage students' efforts in these areas. Being housed in the students' learning strategies documents folder.
	I agree
	I agree as we with the above. We need to improve the direct teaching of EF.
	Integrate our focus into what is needed; don't waste time doing what we don't need to do

A key conversation staff had centred around the need to execute supporting students with goal setting and self-assessing using the following process:

- Don't start with a goal
- Inventory skills first
- Then the strategies students use
- Then goal set

HUNCH - What is leading to this situation?

Often, particularly with older students, we assume they have executive function skills. This assumption is like teachers assuming older students know how to read and comprehend. In online learning environments, knowing where students' skills are at is even harder to discern, as online teachers do not have day-to-day, or face-to-face interactions with students like their brick-and-mortar colleagues. At YouLearn, we have become aware not only of the importance of executive functioning skills to online learning but our role in neglecting promoting executive functioning skills.

Hunch: if we teach executive functioning strategies systematically across our school in the following five areas, and help students learn to goal set and self-assess meaningfully, student engagement, productivity, and success will improve.

- Time Management
- Task Initiation
- Sustained Attention
- Emotional Control
- Impulse Control

LEARNING – How can I learn more of what to do? Questions we are starting with . . .

- How do we effectively teach EF?
- How do we make inventory strengths and stretches engaging for students?
- How do we support students with the processes of goal setting and reflecting?
- How do we improve our management of the new goal setting and reflecting requirements?

OUR INDIGENOUS LEARNERS – How are we there for our Indigenous learners?

TAKING ACTION

Time Management - Students lacked the skills and knowledge to effectively manage their time.
Strategies focused on to help students:

- Use of timers to encourage sustained engagement
- Chunking the day to incorporate work and break sessions
- Pre-planned meeting schedules
- Setting realistic and achievable goals
- Utilizing routines for proper sleeping patterns

Task Initiation - Students cannot complete work at home but are able to work hard and finish tasks at the various centres.

Strategies focused on to help students:

- Minimize the amount of distractions
- Achievable and manageable goals
- Deadlines and making students accountable
- Easier entry points for starting assignments
- Staff guidance and modelling

Sustained Attention - Without sustained attention students lack ability to complete daily tasks.
Strategies to teach and monitor:

- Breaking down larger tasks into smaller, manageable pieces
- Removing clutter and other distractions
- Taking intentional breaks
- Turning off cell phone
- Conquering time versus conquering assignment (use a timer)

Emotional Regulation - Without emotional regulation, students lack ability to participate in or complete daily tasks.

Strategies focused on to help students:

- Ensure proper diet
- Reflect on sleep hygiene
- Develop positive social connections
- Engage in daily physical exercise
- Medication and monitoring
- Mindful techniques
- Time in nature
- Identifying externalized behaviours
- Trigger identification

Task Initiation:

Many students coming into OSS, KLC, NOL cannot complete work at home and are able to work hard and finish tasks at the various centres.

██████—became motivated to work with staff and graduate. Overcame some personal struggles and started to self-advocate. Met with staff, felt supported, communicated regularly, and finished English 12 in two months. Not a traditionally “academic” student but worked hard, was told he was successful and kept going.

Many students--when faced with a deadline, some carryover students responded positively and started turning in work. Staff is considering setting up a set of soft deadlines for each course so that there is some time-related urgency to task complete.

ongoing organization of materials with an adult (resulting in ability to start work, normally lost and spends a long-time finding junk and just being distracted.)

██████ – change the learning environment (reduce distractions) - way more willing to start tasks. She is building learning habits through our guidance and modelling.

██████████—provided an environment where student feels safe and connected—maintains scheduled support sessions and believes he can be successful. Has been able to successfully complete and submit ongoing assignments and is close to course completion in courses.

Sustained Attention —

██████ has a personal workspace created for her to minimize distractions and support task completion.

■ – challenge him to complete a section of work before continuing with his personal stories and distractions.

██████—goal setting and reflecting around sustained attention. Listens to music to buffer environmental noise. Has a set of soft deadlines for course completion.

■ – improved sustained attention – through reduction of distractions (provide a change in learning environment)

_____ - simplified instructions or tasks, influence their ability to work on the subject – encourage students to break into smaller, manageable chunks.

Emotional Regulation--

Many students—staff focuses on strengths—students feel that they are successful. Staff listens to what they are going through, encourage sessions of “walking and talking” allowing students to let go of issues long enough to get a bit of work done.

■■■■—enjoys the building and the staff. Has a snack, works with support, stays as long as he can, asks for more time at KLC. Talks about what he is doing in his life—positives and negatives.

■■■■—back in the building after 6 months. When she came back to school, she was extremely defensive and worried that she would need to “work” right away. Staff has focused on Art so that she is able to become comfortable in the building again.

■■■■ has a 15-minute session of self-care activities before she starts her daily tasks so that she is in the right mindset.

■■■■—was overly concerned with family dynamics and not focused on her own goals. The family wasn’t able to physically open the door to work with her mentor. Became connected and comfortable with her mentor and counsellor and has just completed her ECE program.

■■■■--was struggling with self-worth, dropped out of school for two years, started working with her mentor and her counsellor so that she was able to complete her classes and enter her ECE program

Many students—when they are fed, and feel safe, supported and not judged, they are able to attend regularly and complete more work.

Staff model boundaries emotional regulation, and impulse control by using a calm, neutral voice and providing options to “save face”. Students feel heard.

■■■■ had an issue with plagiarism on his assignments and staff met with him to address this in a calm, controlled, solution-oriented manner. He left feeling a sense of agency, left without being angry and has agreed to re-work some assignments.

■■■■ comes in with her blanket, eats, has ice water and works with an adult to accomplish a daily task. If she can’t self-regulate, she takes a break outside the YL space and tries again the same day or the next day to work.

- Our learning environment supports this. Students have said they feel safe and secure here.
- Supporting our students when they take a dually-enrolled course by going to the first classes with them ■■■■

Impulse Control

- Strategies have been used with students along with time management and task initiation: For example:
 - Discourage multi-tasking – I make sure student only has one thing in front of them when working here
 - Plan for triggers – having [REDACTED] put her phone somewhere else, encouraging others to put them away
 - Build in outside walks – this was done right at the beginning of the year. Students take regular breaks

Actionable Items

- YouLearn EF Questionnaire
 - Minimum of 2 additional surveys conducted
- Ask students if they are willing to be video recorded
- Artifacts and photos of students engaged in EF skills in action