

School District #53 – Okanagan Similkameen
Enhancing Student Learning – YouLearn.ca Staff Inquiry
2021-22

School-Wide Inquiry Question

How do we create meaningful connections to improve student engagement?

Focus Areas

K-7 Engagement Build relationships through community partners and outdoor learning.

8-9 Engagement Refine Mentorship Program.

10-12 and Adult Engagement Implement student activities to foster prosocial engagement, participation, and increase motivation.

1. Our School – Who are we?

YouLearn.ca is School District #53's Distributed Learning (DL) and Continuing Education (CE) School. We provide online learning options to school age and adult learners locally and across British Columbia. In addition to offering distinct K-7, 8-9, 10-12 and adult programs, we also work with complex youth and adults in partnership with the Okanagan Corrections Centre (OCC) and Venture Academy. Over the past three years, we have worked collaboratively with local

brick-and-mortar schools to enhance our services to local learners, and in 2018 we started a DL Inclusion School to address the diverse and underserved needs of vulnerable learners.

Constantly, our population and demographics shift and change. As of September 30, we have a total headcount of 409 students composed of 73.1875 new full-time equivalent (FTE) DL students, 4.75 FTE new CE students, and 36.375 Gr. 10-12 carry over students working to complete courses started last year.

DL numbers overall are up 14.6% from last September and are the highest on record. This increase is the result of an increased awareness of DL as a schooling option, and an increased Inclusion School enrollment of 65% from 17 to 28 students. CE numbers, which come exclusively from OCC, are up 30% from last September. However, OCC enrollment remains down approximately 75% from pre-COVID numbers of 2018-19. Until access and programming issues related to COVID-19 change at OCC, growth is expected to remain slow and limited.

2. Our Learners – What’s going on for our students?

Last year’s inquiry question was *How do we most effectively support our 155 district Transition Students and families in our DL program?*

Initially, we focused our efforts on reducing access barriers, simplifying our program and processes, and meeting students where they were at through adapting our resources and the curriculum. Unfortunately, these efforts did not translate into improved student engagement or success. Re-scanning the situation, we uncovered a profound yet simple correlation:

the more connected students and their families felt to the people in our school, the higher the engagement and resulting student success.

During the second half of last year, we shifted our approach and offered more and more meaningful opportunities for Transition Students and families to connect with staff and one another. This led to qualitative improvements in both student engagement and success. These findings and experiences from last year, combined with our 2019-20 scanning

data, which indicated student relationship and belonging issues, form the basis of this document and this year's staff inquiry.

3. Our Hunch – What's leading to this situation?

We believe the biggest impact to enhancing student learning in our school lies inside our gaining a richer and deeper understanding of how to build community within our various DL environments and diverse populations. In certain situations, we realize that meaningful staff/school connections may not be as important as they are in others. As an example, the value and need for connections for a part-time student upgrading one course at YouLearn, as opposed to a full-time gr. 8 student beginning their high school career with us, is understandably different. As a result, although we are confident that most students will benefit from increased and improved connections, our inquiry will proceed sensitively, aware that improving connections may not be needed or lead to the same results in all situations.

We have long recognized our ability to personalize learning is one of our greatest strengths. However, we have a hunch we need to be more inclusive and culturally sensitive as we build connections and community if we wish to maximize our impact. As an example, we currently have 47 School of Record Indigenous students inside our settler-biased system and colonial/settler-developed courses. In this regard, we are aware of our limitations, look forward to growing, and plan to partner as needed with experts to help us better understand and create “meaningful connections” for our diverse groups.

4. Our Focus, Actions and Checking – Where can we make the biggest impact? What specifically can we do? How will we know we are making enough of an impact?

Inquiry School-Wide Focus: *How do we create meaningful connections to improve student engagement?*

- **K-7 Engagement Focus** - Build relationships through community partners and outdoor learning.

- More and Improved Field Trips – Learning on the Land
 - Provide families with an overview of field trips for the year
 - Plan and coordinate trips with Jenny Martins (Healthy Schools/Indigenous Education)
- News Speaker/Leading Learning Series
 - Partner with experts to work with our communities (face-to-face and online) to create collaborative curricular experiences
 - Examples: Albert Snow (knowledge keeper), Kayla Klassen (Indigenous artist/writer) . . .
- New Targeted and School-Wide Challenges
 - Implement themes-based challenges, such as Keyhos (Indigenous), Math Challenges (Curricular), and Show and Tell opportunities (for primary learners) . . .
- Increase and Improve Student/Parent Meetings
 - Meet and Greet the Teachers (Sept 16), Mid-Year Review (TBA), the Home Stretch (TBA) . . .

Checking: Number of students/families taking part in field trips, survey data of their thoughts, the number of partners and experts who contribute to our programs, number of challenges and student participation rates, student and parent survey of the changes we make.

- **8-9 Engagement Focus** - Refine Mentorship Program.

- Enhanced Accountability and In-Person Connections
- Weekly mandatory mentor check-ins and course-based check-ins
- Subject based Teams chats with collaborative assignments
- Evaluate student Career behaviours such as attendance of check-ins, scheduling, goal setting, and time management

Checking: Students on track with their schedules, work regularly submitted in ALL courses, are both teacher and student regularly communicating, successful completion of courses and Gr08/09 credits.

- **10-12 and Adult Engagement Focus** - Implement student activities to foster prosocial engagement, participation, and increase motivation.

10-12 Engagement Activities to Promote Prosocial Engagement

What we are providing:

Community Connections

- Work Experience/Career opportunities
- Certificates and employability training
 - Food Safe in November – Brenda's contact
 - Firefighting S100 training in the spring
 - Developing Workforce Trades certificate course
 - Student for a day – CATO
 - Promoting dual-credit programs, welding program OC – EMR program at Kelowna
- Outside agencies – counselling
 - Increasing the number of community partners
 - Offering remote counselling
 - Alternative counselling options
 - 12-month counselling
 - Formalized contract for counselling process
- Wellness opportunities
 - Volunteer opportunities
 - Adopt-a-family in December
 - Prosocial Engagements:
 - Pottery Lessons
 - Yoga Lessons

- Float therapy
- Hoodoo Adventures – possibly skiing or snowboarding, public skate, survival training in the spring (field trips)

How we are executing it:

- Frontloading work experience programs through mentorship and intake
- Steve has been encouraging Work Experience, especially more with at-risk students
- Discussing benefits of wellness activities, I.e. yoga during intake
- Discussing benefits of counselling during intake
- Scheduling intake meetings then an immediate follow-up meeting
- Working with students to offer field trips they would enjoy (10-12)

How we are tracking it (CHECKING):

- Feedback from students about how much they like pottery and yoga
- 3 students taking pottery and one more interested
- 4 students signed up for yoga
- # of activities and programs provided to students
- # of community partners
 - # of recommendations from other community partners
- % of SOR students – Grade 10 and up participating in activities
- % of inclusion students engaged in their coursework? How do we measure this?
- % of people following up with counselling sessions consistently?
- Seeing certificates on resumes
- Course for Working in Trades

10-12 and Adult Engagement Activities to Promote Participation and Motivation

- Gr. 10-12
 - Offer cross-curricular field trips, using Knowledge Keepers when applicable
 - Offer ecosystem field trips, such as visiting the Sockeye spawning site in Penticton (traditional ways of knowing)
 - Subject-based in-person classes/lessons (possibly Art and cooking)
- Adults
 - Create welcome videos for our adult courses and program
 - Create regular in-person and online opportunities for students to connect
 - Promote weekly online, phone, and drop-in sessions devoted to adults
 - Scheduled 'class time' each week and one unscheduled check-in (at OCC)

Checking: Number of field trips, in-person classes and student participation rates, changes in course data (such as frequency and timing of submissions and/or Moodle logins or views), changes to assessments produced and assessment strategies used as a result of face-to-face contact, student survey of engagement and motivation (10-12 and adult).

5. Our Learning – What do we need to learn?

Creating meaningful connections is a human endeavor. Rather than investing in our online curriculum, or learning resources, or technology, we are deliberately choosing to focus on improving relationships to enhance student engagement and success. Currently, this is where we feel the greatest impact can be made to benefit our students. As a DL school, however, we have much to consider and learn, particularly around how we will go about balancing and blending an online delivery model with an increase in face-to-face offerings. In addition, we are acutely aware of the impact COVID-19 has had on students and families over the past 18 months and intend to grow in how we promote wellness inside our learning communities using a trauma informed approach.

6. Our Indigenous Learners – How do we meet the needs of our Indigenous learners?

As of October 01, we are proud to have on staff our first and very own Indigenous Advocate. Over the years, we have collaborated with local Advocates to support our students and adapt our programs to better serve Indigenous students. One example of a recent protocol change we made is to include advocates inside intake meetings for all new incoming Indigenous students. More good work, however, is needed. In the coming months, we look forward to working with and supporting our Advocate, as we learn how best to support our Indigenous students and families, indigenize our courses, and honour Indigenous Ways of Knowing in the Spirit of Truth and Reconciliation.