



Johnson Elementary Draft School Review Report

Johnson Elementary School

Date:

School Principal: Denis Ryan

Vice-Principal: Ruby Busse

Date of Review: April 30 – May 2

School Review Team:

- Gayle Bedard, Director First Nations Programs and Partnerships
- Gloria Coxford, Principal Grey Mountain Primary School
- Peter Gubbe, Principal Selkirk Elementary School
- Roberta Hager, School council Chair and Director of Education Natcho Nyak Dunn
- Robin Lord, Education Coordinator Carcross Tagish First Nation
- Penny Prysruk, Superintendent, Area 2
- Greg Storey superintendent, Area 3
- Judy Arnold, Director, DOE

Meetings with the School included:

- The School Growth Planning Team
- Liard First Nation Chief and Council
- Students
- School Council and community representatives
- Classroom visits

School Context

Johnson Elementary school serves the kindergarten to grade seven students in Watson Lake. Of the 118 student enrolled at the school, most are members of the Liard First Nation and the school provides Kaska language instruction. 50% of the students are on Individual Education Plans (IEPs). In the last three year there have been two principals at the school and a new principal will be in place for the fall of 2012. Johnson Elementary School has a School Council that serves both schools in Watson Lake.

Norms and Culture:

Characteristics:

Continuously improving schools are socially and culturally inclusive with high expectations for each learner. A focus on continuous improvement is evident.

Observations of the Team:

- The part of the school used by students is clean, in good repair, and student work, murals and First Nations artifacts cover the walls. There are plans for a new addition to the hall murals,
 - The older front portion of the school will eventually be removed and staff are very concerned about the need for storage space and space for some student activities related to woodworking or applied skills;
- Staff, School Council, parents, and the Liard First Nation (LFN) were concerned about the lack of success of many of the learners. Everyone expressed a desire for all students to meet high standards and an interest in doing what is best for each student especially in relation to attendance and literacy development;
- The Team noted that students were friendly, quiet and orderly;
- Students, that the Team met with, commented that they liked the school and that although there was still bullying that it was less than in previous years,
 - Staff noted improved behaviour on the playground. However, staff also commented that there continues to be challenges in addressing some of the behavioural and social/emotional needs of students and consistency of approach would be very helpful,
 - The school has implemented a transition room to be used for students that need some time out of the regular program for individual support;
- The school appears to have limited contact with the secondary school and there is no collective approach to addressing student needs when students transition from elementary to secondary school;
 - The Team noted that although the elementary and secondary schools work with the same students and have the same School Council that a shared vision for the schools and ways to connect the educators at both schools to better serve the students has not yet been developed.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Work as a school, with school council, and LFN to develop a consistent and restorative approach to behaviour which includes strategies to develop cultural sensitivity and address bullying issues,
 - Communicate the approach to the community;
- Consider ways to efficiently use space. This should include:
 - Exploring ways to work with the secondary school so that students in later intermediate grades can access the secondary facility in order to provide support the arts, music and applied skills,
 - Reviewing the configuration of both elementary and secondary schools;
- With Department assistance, work with the staff at both schools, students, parents, School Council and LFN work together to develop a shared direction for the two schools, including but not limited to:

- Developing a transition plan between the elementary and secondary schools that includes opportunities for both staffs to work together to better understand each other and support the students;
 - After the return of the principal, currently on maternity leave at the secondary school, use the skills of the semester one principal to facilitate transitions and explore alternate or creative approaches to learning for all students;
- Work with the Department and First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit (FNPP), to:
 - Integrate First Nations culture and language across the curriculum and make use of local resources including Elders,
 - Examine the current provision for counselling and then explore ways to strengthening access to support for the social, emotional and behavioural needs of all students,
 - This may involve LFN and community agencies.

Community

Characteristics: In continuously improving schools build a shared commitment to success for each learner. The school collaborates with parents, students, school council, First nations and community to support student learning. Ongoing parent/community involvement is embedded in school culture and the school communicates about progress and challenges in multiple ways.

Observations of the Team:

- Staff discussed the value of working together as staff to foster a team approach at the school;
- Staff commented that they are eager to have parents engaged with the school to support learning.
 - Staff noted that at student led conferences parental attendance is good and it has helped to develop connections with the community,
 - Parents also attend BBQ, sports fun days, school spirit, intramurals and CARES assemblies,
 - However, staff and School Council also reflected on the need for more ways to help all parents, particularly First Nations parents, feel welcome and more comfortable at the school;
- Staff, School Council, parents and LFN Chief and Council commented that to help the students all of the partner groups need to work productively together,
 - Chief Liard Macmillan strongly suggested that the groups need to move beyond blame and be brought together to find ways at the school, in the community and with other agencies to address the needs of the students,
 - To begin this process Chief Macmillan suggested a community summit or gathering in the fall where issues can be discussed without pointing fingers and strategies identified that will help students be more successful;
- The Team noted a disconnect between the staff and the School Council. The staff does not feel supported by the Council and the Council feels that their concerns are not heard or responded to at the school,
 - School Council and staff also feel that their concerns about both Watson Lake schools are not being heard by the Department of Education.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue to focus on building rapport and working relationships with parents and community,
 - Work with LFN to help First Nations parents feel more welcome and to build understanding of the work the school is doing to support learners;
- With representation from all partner groups, collaborate with senior Department staff to:
 - Establish positive student focused working relationships among all partners,
 - Create processes for addressing ongoing concerns,
 - Address social, emotional, academic and cultural issues,
 - Create an ongoing communications plan.

School Organization

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools organize structures, actions, and interventions to ensure success for each learner. Work in the school is coherent and aligned to focus on improvement. Actions and interventions include effectively differentiating resources, time and professional development to get results. The Department supports the school and makes connections across the Territory to build capacity.

Observations of the Team:

- The school provides a variety of activities for students including wrestling, basketball, participation in the Arctic Winter Games, and whole school multi-grade events,
 - Recently, connections have been made with Teslin for cultural activities including tapping birch, drum making and competitive games;
- Staff talked about the work done to give students success at their individual levels,
 - Many students have independent learning goals,
 - There is some creative timetabling to support learners, blocks in literacy and combined gym classes, as well as a stations approach that is flexible;
- The primary teachers work as a team to address the needs of the students,
 - The daily 5, Reading Power, 6 Plus 1 writing, “foundations” for phonics, and guided reading groups,
 - Writing is a focus and rubrics are in use to assess progress- staff noted that writing skills have improved,
 - For mathematics the IXL online math program to support sequential, practice appears to be having a positive impact;
- The intermediate teachers are in the process developing a similar consistent approach to the development of literacy skills;
- Educational Assistants (EAs) are used flexibly at the school in order to match student needs with EA skills. EAs would appreciate training in relation to the development of literacy skills at all levels;
- The school is making good use of technology; the Promethean boards appear to engage students, particularly in Kaska classes, as they give students a chance to be interactive. iPads are used on a rotating basis;
- The transition room is designed around what the students need to get them integrated back into the class. Staff noted that this approach has helped in supporting the social emotional and behavioural needs of students;
- Chief and Council and School council want to understand special education designation, and suggested the need for counselling and an interagency approach to helping students be more successful;
- Staff and would like to see the Department provide embedded professional development at the school, have more consistent visits from special programs and provide some assistance in completing the IEP process.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Work with Department consultants, School Council, LFN and parents to:
 - Build understanding in the community of how the school supports learners both struggling and strong and the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process,
 - Department and school staff could work together provide evening information sessions for parents and community

- Explore an interagency approach to support social emotional development
 - Ensure that report cards accurately describe the achievement of students in relation to grade level expectations or the goals in the IEP;
- Ensure that:
 - Stronger students and students not able to participate in field trips, have relevant and challenging activities in place at the school;
 - The to focus on literacy development through consistency of approach is extended to the intermediate level;
- Enhance the active learning/ experiential approach as a way to engage students and achieve grade level expectations;
- Work with FNPP and LFN to:
 - Strengthen the connection between curricula and First Nations culture,
 - Consider a summer literacy camp.
- With the help of senior Department staff, engage with the Programs and Services Unit and Students Support Services Unit to:
 - Provide embedded professional development at the school,
 - Have more consistent visits from Student Support Services,
 - Assist in completing the IEP process,
 - Explore professional development for Educational Assistants.

School Processes and Progress

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools take responsibility for improving outcomes for students. They use evidence to guide decisions and actions and have processes in place to collectively monitor progress and make adjustments in key areas of their work. They demonstrate improvement over time – for individual students, groups of students, and the school.

Observations of the Team:

- The school growth plan focuses on literacy and social responsibility and staff were aware of the directions. The school is also using behavior plans and a team approach to address issues
- Staff, School Council and Chief and Council expressed concern about the literacy and numeracy skills of the students and results from school level assessments and the Yukon Achievement Tests results confirm this concern;
- Attendance was identified as an issues at the school,
 - 46% of student at the school are absent more than 20 days each year. 80% of Kindergarten and grade one students have been absent more than 30 days, Although improvement is noted and the school is working hard to address the issue, staff feels that the parents need a deeper understanding of the effects of absence on achievement,
 - This year monthly parent letters and certificates for good attendance have been used;
 - The Team noted that the school year at Johnson Elementary for 2012-2013 in terms of number of days at school is the shortest in Yukon,
 - Staff suggested that because of absence keeping students for a longer day may help achievement ;
- The school is beginning to use data to identify where students are in literacy and track progress made over the school year. However, the use of evidence to guide instruction, determine interventions for individual students and evaluate the effectiveness of current strategies was not strong;
- Chief and Council would like to see an early learning or strong start centre at that the school that would support learning and the development of vocabulary and oral language for pre-kindergarten students.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Work with Department consultants and staff to develop individual student profiles that provide clarity as to the academic performance and social emotional development of each student,
 - Refine strategies to address needs;
- Work with School Council in the development of the 2013-2014 calendar that takes into consideration the research on length of day and the effects of lengthened summers breaks on student achievement;
- Continue with the goals, reading and social responsibility and the focus on attendance,
 - This may include working with students, staff, parents, School Council LFN and community to get a clearer understanding of why students are not attending

school and then the development of innovative approaches to address the issues;

- The Department is embarking on a strategy to address attendance which will involve grants for schools;
- Use data to not only determine where students are at in literacy and numeracy but to guide the decisions and actions at the a school as well as determine the effectiveness of strategies in place,
 - Refine or revise strategies as required;
- Work with the Department to undertake a review of the configuration of both the elementary and secondary schools so that:
 - Space is used effectively and students have consistent access to hands on learning, applied skills and music,
 - An early learning centre (Learning Together program) can be established at the school.

Conclusions:

The focus on literacy and improving attendance in the school growth plan is positive. And, as at the secondary school, it was clear to the Team that all partner groups wish to see the learners at Johnson Elementary experience academic as well as social emotional success.

The need to set priorities from the recommendations and develop short and longer term plans with partner groups, and at the Department of Education to support the diverse learners at the school was evident.

With the ongoing support and involvement of the Department of Education, creative strategies to address individual leaning needs and a collaborative approach that includes all partner groups, the Team believes that improved outcomes can be achieved.

Practices to share:

Use of promethean board for Kaska language development