Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project
Circle of Light
“Learning Together for Student Success”
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“develop innovative approaches to meet the needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students living in large urban centres in collaboration with school boards as well as First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities and organizations.”
unique challenges due to the specific nature of the urban environment.

urban programming
Structures

- Steering Committee
- Research sub-committee
- School board sub-committees
  - Local evaluators
- Provincial evaluators
School Boards

- **Lakehead District School Board**
  - medium urban centre with higher concentrations of Aboriginal students in some schools and an Aboriginal school-aged population in Thunder Bay of 3,040.

- **Simcoe County District School Board**
  - small urban centre with high concentrations of Aboriginal students in some of the board's schools and an Aboriginal student population estimated at 3,300.

- **Toronto District School Board**
  - large urban centre with a dispersed Aboriginal student population, except for one elementary school, and has an Aboriginal school-aged population of 2,940.
Guiding Principles

1. Vigorous community partnerships and alliances,
2. Safe and welcoming environment,
3. Multiple programs, flexibility and supports for learners,
4. Strong leadership, accountability and sustainability, and
5. Demonstrated respect for Aboriginal worldviews and Indigenous knowledge.
Key Activities and Success Stories
Overarching Indicators of Success

- Increased Self ID reported by all three boards.
- Increased Demand for Services for Aboriginal students and families.
Key Areas of Activity

1. Establishing and increasing school board commitment.
2. Meeting urgent needs of FNMI students and families.
3. Creating outreach, self identification and linkages among students and families.
4. Improving self confidence and academic achievement of Aboriginal students.
5. Increasing cultural understandings of all staff and students.
What does Effective Practice look like?

Examples from the Participating Boards.
Powerful Indicators of School Board Commitment

- Allocation of resources to Aboriginal Education.
- Aboriginal education as an element of long term school board planning.
Examples of School Board Commitment

- Principal and staff positions created in participating school boards.
- Implementation of Aboriginal Advisory Committees
- Trustee and Senior Staff champions
Meeting Urgent Needs of FNMI Students

- One to one supports for students:
  - Simcoe and Toronto’s CYWs/CYCs and Student Success teachers.

- Support for transitions:
  - Lakehead’s transition program

- Financial support for students:
  - Toronto’s employment opportunities
Creating Outreach, Self ID and Linkages among FNMI Students and Families

- Outreach to Aboriginal students
  - Toronto assemblies
  - Simcoe ‘Lodges’

- Outreach to Families:
  - Simcoe community gatherings and feasts
  - Lakehead’s Family Connections Program
Self Id: A reported positive increase in self identification in all boards was credited to:

- Increased presence of Aboriginal cultures, programming and services.

Relationships with Aboriginal families working to break down historical barriers and mistrust.

Attention to staff self identification.
Creating linkages for FNMI students

- Toronto’s large focus on this is due to dispersal of Aboriginal population.
- Decision to focus on isolated students.
- Activities and events included camps, cultural celebrations, learning symposia and district wide projects.
Self Confidence and Academic Needs of FNMI Students

Direct individual interventions:
- Lakehead’s Literacy Support program for Gr. 7 and 8
- Simcoe’s Child and Youth Workers and Lodges
- Toronto’s Student Success Teachers and Counsellors
Direct Interventions: Group Support

- Toronto’s Elders’ Literacy Program
- Simcoe’s Talking Circles
Direct Interventions: Group Skills

- Lakehead’s Peer Mentoring Program
- Simcoe’s Early Literacy Program
- Toronto’s ‘Riverdale’ York University course
Welcoming environments:

- Toronto’s welcoming packages and assemblies
- Lakehead’s Welcoming Learning Environment – an environmental scan
- Simcoe’s Lodges provided an environment for a number of activities.
Professional development, curriculum and classes

- Simcoe provided Itinerant Resource Teachers to 4 schools
- Lakehead targeted mandatory PD at Grade 5, 7, 9 and Grade 10 Civics for which they had developed curriculum.
- Toronto’s Arts Based Project provided PD as well as opportunities to partner with Aboriginal artists to over 50 schools.
Making FNMI Cultural Resources Available to Students and Teachers

- Simcoe’s FNMI literacy and learning baskets containing fiction, non-fiction, and cultural resources to all 88 schools.

- Lakehead’s First People’s Cultural Resource Baskets differentiated for primary and secondary and given to each school.

- Toronto’s fully catalogued Library/Resource room also equipped with a Smart Board and student computers for tutor/mentoring.
Challenges and Lessons Learned

5 Types of Activities
1. Establishing and Increasing School Board Commitment

- **Indicator of Success**
  - All school boards decided to maintain some or all of their activities beyond UAEPP, however, funding not guaranteed

- **Stakeholders are concerned that there may be no long-term commitment and continued support for UAEPP activities**
Challenges

- May lose momentum and Aboriginal families might have further reason to lose faith in the education system.

  *Aboriginal education is a deep systemic set of issues and complexities that requires a systemic response. A systemic approach by a school board requires years and (the) funds for it to take hold and make a serious impact.* (Korteweg, 2010, p.2)

- School board priorities reflect provincial priorities. This must remain a priority for the province.
Lessons Learned

- TDSB has a diverse student population which places pressure on available resources to meet student needs.
- Some boards had full and visible support at every level, while in some resources could have been maximized by more visible school board-level support for Aboriginal education and more integrated approach to board programming.
2. Urgent Needs of FNMI Students

- Urgent needs remained when project funding was no longer available.
- As students access new services, the demand increases then levels off to a steady flow.
- Flexibility is required to meet entry and exit needs of students.
Challenges

- Urgent needs diverse
- Ranging from academic, emotional, physical, and cultural
- Wide diversity provided a significant challenge for school boards engaging in addressing Aboriginal education
Lessons Learned

- Hiring staff which provided a foundation from which projects worked to address the diverse needs
  - Aboriginal staff members
  - Those with specific skill set such ad CYW (SCDSB) and Student Success Teachers (TDSB)

- Student transition from remote communities
  - Some challenges were academic
  - As the Aboriginal population grows, schools will face increasing challenges in supporting students in transition
LDSB Transitions Program

- LDSB offered a transitions program for First Nation students which provided greater flexibility in providing a positive school experience early in the transition process including designing individual student programs.
- Literacy supports also in place.
Transitions Program Included…

- Connected to Grade 9 *Learning Strategies* course
- Welcome Kits
- Mural - Welcoming Environment
- Wrote Grade 10 Locally Developed Course
- Focus Health and Physical Education - Indigenous
- Cultural Activities
- Aboriginal Role Models
- Elders/ Senators
- Community-wide welcome orientation event
- Outreach with community student orientations
Support Staff

- SCDSB retained four CYWs
- TDSB retained all of their programming
- LDSB has maintained social workers at each secondary site with support to elementary feeder schools' students as well as an Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher
- Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) project has CYWs in our schools to support students both during the day and after school in school settings
Personal Needs

- One site identified the day-to-day personal needs of students posed a challenge.
- So, specific students who were in need were selected to work for pay in the Aboriginal Education Centre and received vouchers.
- Provided assistance for eye glasses for a student.
3. Outreach, Self-ID, and Linkages for Students and Families

- **Challenges**
  - Some reluctance to self-identify for fear of facing discrimination, but UEAPP seems to alleviate this
  - Increased use of services as the awareness of programming rose, putting pressure on resources

- **Lessons Learned**
  - SCDSB reported greatest success in engagement through both one-on-one interactions as well as school and board-wide events
4. Self-Confidence and Academic Needs of FNMI Students

- Few challenges noted with the exception of academic challenges of those in transition
- Further exploration is required in area of Aboriginal secondary school students
- Both TDSB Riverdale Course and LDSB’s literacy program were found to be successful
5. Cultural Understanding for All Staff and Students

- Welcoming Environments
- Professional Development
- Resource Distribution
Welcoming Environments

• Creating welcoming environments very important for all projects
• Intention to create a supportive environment without creating alienation

Challenges
  • Some reluctance in schools with lower Aboriginal population-invisibility
  • Some perception of special treatment in one projects student population

• LDSB incorporated FNMI cultures and histories as integral components of Canadian history, and contemporary life in Canada
• SCDSB incorporated a whole-school infusion approach and at elementary level this did not appear to cause resentment
Professional Development

- Community members invaluable in both professional development and in creating culturally appropriate atmospheres
- The Ontario Native Women’s Association highlighted the importance of addressing the cultural teachings and the infusion of First Nation, Métis and Inuit culture in classrooms and through PD offered to all non-Aboriginal teachers
Resource Distribution

• all projects engaged in creating resources
• Distributed through a variety of means, but little data available to demonstrate how use was encouraged
• LDSB trained teachers at workshop series on the resources prior to the resources going into each of their schools, both elementary and secondary
Three School Board Models
As district school boards across the province continue their efforts to meet the needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students much can be learned from the experiences of the three school boards participating in UAEPP. These three models, while not an exact representation of each board’s activities, are meant to illustrate the options for a school board in their planning of targeted Aboriginal programs and services.
Boards with Minimal Prior Activities

School Boards With Minimal Activities

1. Establishing and increasing school board commitment
2. Meeting urgent needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students
3. Creating outreach, self-identification and linkages among First Nation, Métis and Inuit students and families
4. Improving self-confidence and academic achievement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students

Primary Focus
Secondary Focus
Emphasis on:

- Resource development including safe environments, partnerships, professional development
- Newly developed direct interventions including one to one support from CYWs, CYCs, special assignment teachers and social workers
Boards with Prior Activity and a Low Density dispersed Population
Focus on all students and staff:

- Partnership development for expert advice and programming.
- Outreach and creation of a safe central environment.
- Emphasis on individual support through mentoring, tutoring, counseling and group extra curricular activities.
Boards with Many Prior Activities and a High Density Target Population

School Boards With Many Activities

1. Establishing and increasing school board commitment
2. Meeting urgent needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students
3. Creating outreach, self-identification and linkages among First Nation, Métis and Inuit students and families
4. Improving self-confidence and academic achievement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students
5. Increasing cultural understandings of all staff and students

Primary Focus
Secondary Focus
Tertiary Focus
For boards with an extensive complement of activities that appear to be effective with Aboriginal students, the emphasis is on reaching non FNMI students in order to increase their cultural understanding through:

- Continue direct student intervention through tutoring, mentoring, supports for literacy and group activities
- Resource development emphasis is on curriculum resources for all classrooms
Utilizing the resources developed for these purposes, the three types of activities that might be found in these school boards are:

- Development of welcoming environments
- Targeted professional development
- Making First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultural resources available to all schools
While the development of three models is intended to give direction to school boards in their planning for Aboriginal education, interested school boards might identify with more than one of the models described and could draw from many of the lessons learned and activities described depending on the needs of their students and families.
Sustainability

- TDSB will maintain all Aboriginal-specific programming
- LDSB built linkages for Aboriginal education programming in long term BIP
- SCDSB FNMI student achievement, programming, FNMI Principal and Student Advisors
Conclusions

- Capitalize on the structures, processes, momentum and partnerships to make long-term improvements set out in FNMI Policy Framework
  - Knowledge
  - Funding
  - Commitment
  - Communication
  - Transitions require more support
School boards need to be aware at the outset that as awareness grows so too will the need for ongoing commitment and capacity development.

Sustainability planning must be a key consideration in order to continue the positive gains in relationship building and parent/community engagement.
Reluctance of Aboriginal parents to become involved in their child’s education based on fears related to non-acceptance and discrimination was a real barrier for the pilot projects.

Other common barriers in the projects were the lack of engagement of families and self-identification.
Creating cultural understanding through professional development was a strength in all of the pilot projects.

The value of community participation not be underestimated in this process.

The development of teaching and learning resources was a primary component of all of the school boards. The effectiveness of the distribution of these resources and their uptake was inconclusive in this evaluation.
Recommendations for Future Programming and Development of Urban Aboriginal Education Approaches

- board resources
- Strategic priority setting is necessary.
- Avoid initiating efforts that cannot be supported in the long-term
- Trust building and relationship building with families and community are necessary.
- Develop and continue partnership between the Aboriginal community
- Establish a formal position or office,
- Prioritize resource allocation
- Establish and sustain school board commitment, ideally through a senior level “champion”.
- Meet urgent student needs.
- whole school approaches
- encourage the hiring of Aboriginal teachers, educators, Elders and professionals.
- engage qualified experts
Professional development

Conduct independent qualitative and quantitative evaluation of all activities and programs to measure quality and effectiveness.
Questions