

Beavercrest Community School

Bluewater District School Board Markdale, Ontario

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Some Snapshots

Students ...

- help determine recess games and lunchroom privileges
- participate in Markdale Arts for Youth, learning and playing music with local musicians
- take part in social justice circles
- create safety videos for YouTube with the Fire Department

Parents ...

- are highly involved in the structured volunteer reading program, school community council, breakfast club, sports activities and Markdale Arts for Youth

About the school ...

Beavercrest is a Kindergarten to Grade 8 school in Markdale, a village along the Niagara Escarpment in Grey Highlands. The school serves about 270 students, almost three-quarters of whom are bused into school. Many Beavercrest parents are former students, creating continuity across generations of students.

This family-like school community has undergone a transformation in recent years. "We used to have problems," one teacher said. "We gave up on kids and the parents gave up on us. The principal said, 'Let's start fresh.'" Now three principles guide their daily work together: they believe it takes a community to raise a child, they put students first and they engage in intentional teaching based on information and data. The culture of the school, once centred on the belief that only some students can succeed, has been revitalized as the belief has taken root that all children can succeed given the appropriate academic, emotional and social supports.

Ongoing improvement ...

The results of the EQAO 2007-08 assessments show significant increases in all Grade 3 and 6 assessments over the past three years. The Grade 6 assessments are all above the provincial target of 75 per cent and are significantly higher than board and provincial results. The diligent work of the school is also reflected in the work of Grade 3 students, with 90 per cent performing at or above the provincial standard in writing and mathematics. The school has attained this success while facing many challenges.

Success after struggle ...

When staff members realized that a high percentage of students were reading below level, they searched for an approach to support them. A user-friendly, sequential and structured daily reading program designed to reinforce phonemic awareness and reading skills was organized and staffed by trained community and parent volunteers who collectively put in 40 to 60 intervention hours a week. Data indicate that this has been a very effective intervention.

When significant behaviour issues negatively influenced teaching, learning and safety in the school yard, a deliberate focus on “learning skills” became a priority. Information about learning skills was included in classroom discussions and high expectations for students were established and communicated to students and parents. Difficulties were often reframed as a learning skill so that students could gain a concrete understanding of how behaviour affects teaching and learning. At the same time, teachers worked as a group to help students make connections between their learning and the real world in order to make school more relevant and engaging.

Teaching, learning and leading ...

Positive relationships. Staff members believe that the quality of student relationships reflects the quality of adult relationships in the school community. Building positive relationships with one another and with parents, students and their numerous community partners is a major priority. In the words of the principal, “What our teachers do is model for students how to behave, how to learn and how to change.”

Professional learning community (PLC). In a culture that supports risk taking and thinking outside the box, staff members immerse themselves in improving and refining professional practice. One teacher said, “We admitted there might be a better way to do it.” Another said, “When we find a tool that’s working for kids, we share it.” Their school PLC is built upon teamwork, reflective teaching and professional sharing. As student learning needs change, so do teachers’ learning needs, changing the focus of the PLC.

Focus on individual students. Teachers believe it is important not only to look at data trends as a whole but also to focus on each child individually. This individual approach has helped teachers build connections with students so that they can support them as they find their “currency” in the classroom. “Don’t fixate on the marks,” one teacher said. “Fixate on the kids.” When students feel valued, they are able to take the necessary risks associated with learning. The focus on individual students has helped teachers design authentic inquiry tasks that let students make decisions based on their own learning styles. The focus also helps teachers organize classroom groupings based on students’ interests and instructional needs.



Use of technology. Technology has expanded students’ ability to communicate and demonstrate their learning. The school is continuing to explore how to broaden the use of technology, including SMART Boards and assistive devices, to support student learning.

Shared and distributed leadership. The school leadership team ensures that teachers receive the tools and supports they need for their professional learning. There is a high degree of professional and personal trust between the staff and administration. The principal models openness, respect for staff and a willingness to dig deeper when students are not achieving as expected. Teachers take responsibility for the success of all of their students.

“This is a changed place – kids know what to expect and what is expected of them. There is a gentle firmness and a healthy calmness.” *Volunteer*

“The focus is on learning skills and moving forward.” *Parent*

“We became risk-takers and said – ‘Let’s try it!’ – we knew we had to change.” *Teacher*

“We rethought our philosophy of teaching – it was a struggle but as we became convinced we were able to convince others.” *Teacher*

“It is always about doing what is right for student learning. I build trust and create positive energy to support my staff and students.” *Principal*

Moving into the future

- ◆ continue to work with data and practise intentional teaching – find the gaps and take action
- ◆ find ways to address small school operational issues to maximize instruction
- ◆ build our knowledge of effective use of manipulatives in problem-solving-based mathematics instruction
- ◆ increase our focus on writing
- ◆ continue to educate parents on learning, mental health issues and character development