



Takhini Elementary School Review Report

Takhini Elementary School

Date: October 2011

School Principal: Kelly Collins
Vice-Principal: Melanie Bennett

Date of Review: September 12 to 14, 2011

School Review Team:

Chantelle Bode, Secondary School Support Worker
Champagne & Aishihik First Nation
Stacey Burnard, Consultant, Department of Education (DOE)
Carol Coote, Executive Director, AYSCBC
Mike Woods, Superintendent Area 1, DOE
Judy Arnold, Director, DOE

Meetings with the School included:

- The School Growth Planning Team
- Staff
- Students from primary and intermediate classes
- School Council representatives
- Classroom visits

School Context

Takhini Elementary School is located in the Takhini area of Whitehorse and currently serves 144 students from Kindergarten to grade seven. More than half of the students enrolled in the school are of First Nations ancestry and many students are at the school because their parents are enrolled at Yukon College. As a result there is significant transience in the student population over the course of a school year. In 2010-2011, 89 new students came into the school and 80 transferred out. For the last few years, the school has had single gender classes and for 2011-2012, the grades four to seven students are in single gender configurations.

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 school is warm and welcoming and there is an atmosphere of optimism about the year ahead,
 - Staff and School Council were delighted with the positive start to the year,
 - Staff commented that last year had been very challenging but that the work done to address issues has paid off;
 - Staff also expressed a desire to focus on working together to sustain consistency across the school in relation to their work with students;
- It was apparent to the Team that the staff genuinely cares for each of the students and their focus is to address individual needs, be they social, emotional or academic, in order to move students forward,
 - The school is open and welcomes students early in the morning;
- There was creative and colourful student work as well as positive messages to the students on the walls;
- Students were proud of their school and were eager to talk about the opportunities they have at the school;
 - With more than half of the students of First Nation's ancestry, there is an increasing cultural presence in the school and in the work in classrooms,
 - The work related to the welcome poles and the dance group activities are exemplary;
- The school would appreciate having a half time First Nations Educational Support Worker and moving forward to embed Yukon First Nations culture in all curricular areas;
- At the beginning of the school year, the school had a two week training camp for students to establish expectations, focus on social responsibility, and build a sense of community.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Work collaboratively as a staff to put strategies in place to sustain and enhance the approach that has resulted in a positive start to the year;
- Work with the Department to explore ways to have an Educational Support Worker at the school to liaise with First Nations and support First Nations students;
- Build on the good work already in place, to further embed Yukon First Nations culture and perspectives across the curriculum and in the work on social responsibility.

Community

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools build a shared commitment to success for each learner. The school collaborates with parents, students, School Council, Yukon 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:

- The School Council is actively involved in the work of the school and relationships are positive,
 - Staff and School Council were eager to find ways to tell the public about the good things going on at the schools in order to change what was felt to be negative perceptions;
- The Team was impressed with the professionalism among the staff and the commitment to work together to support the students,
 - Staff mentioned that historically, communications at the school had been a challenge but that things are much improved and should continue;
- Staff noted that reaching out to parents and finding ways to engage them in the work of the school was an ongoing focus for them;
- Along with the training camp to support the development community norms and social responsibility, the school was embarking on initiatives based on restorative processes and the work of Gordon Neufeld,
 - However, some staff observed that there had been a variety of initiatives in the past but they had not been sustained over time,
 - At the time of the review, students appeared to have limited understanding of the Code in Action (behaviour expectations) or the focus and direction of the school,
 - Intermediate students appeared eager to be engaged in the work and take on leadership roles at the school;
- The school has a significant turn-over of students throughout the year and concerns were expressed about the need to provide a consistent approach to making the students aware of school culture, context and expectations as well as quickly getting an understanding of academic needs;
- Staff and School Council are looking to the school administration to sustain the current positive professional approach, ensure that communications among staff and with School Council are ongoing and focused on building consensus about, and understanding of, the initiatives at the schools.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Ensure that all staff understand current directions and limit new initiatives to those that have the most impact on student success;
- Ensure that procedures are in place to continue to build consistency, consensus and strong communication among staff, School Council, students and community;
- Explore ways to engage the broader community in the work of the school and celebrate its successes;
- To support the work of social responsibility, have the students work with their teachers to develop rubrics for behavior and social interaction based on the BC Social Responsibility performance standards which can then be used across the school,
 - Engage students in assessing themselves, their classrooms and the school;

- Samples of student friendly standards for social responsibility, literacy, and numeracy can be found at <http://www.npbs.ca/performance-standards/samples>;
- Develop clearly understood roles, responsibilities, and procedures for new students to the school so that they can, quickly understand the culture and expectations and the school can quickly understand their learning needs;
- Work with Yukon College, the Department and the rural receiving schools to ensure that when students leave Takhini with their parents at the end of the college term, there is an expectation that they attend school for the remainder of the year in their home communities;
- Explore ways to build leadership skills among the intermediate students. Their voices should be heard in the development of the School Growth Plan, looking at the effectiveness of the Code in Action, Timberwolves awards and other strategies used to create the conditions for learning.

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:

- Last year, the school faced a number challenges in their work with students and an audit was conducted by Department of Education staff. The school has worked very hard to address the recommendations from the audit;
- The reading pilot across the school and the consistent strategies embedded in Reading Power and Six Plus One writing strategies will have positive effects on literacy outcomes over the long term;
- There is a continuum of literacy development in the primary grades to meet the needs of students who learn quickly as well as those who need extra support. However, concerns were expressed about the need to challenge those students who meet and/or exceed grade level expectations in both primary and intermediate classes;
- Students have many unique and interesting opportunities to be engaged at the school including a skipping program which has received national attention, a woodworking program which takes place in a hallway outside the gym, beading and First Nations dancing, drumming and singing, and sports programs for intermediate students;
- Regarding the configuration of classes at the school, primary classes are on the main floor and intermediate classes are upstairs--this allows for ongoing interaction among the teachers. However, the kindergarten class is in a separate area of the school which limits integration with the primary classrooms especially the grade ones;
- Staff would appreciate more collaboration time and expressed concern about the time it currently takes to complete the paper work required for school-based team or the IEP process;
- Students expressed mixed feelings about the single gender classrooms, some thought they were great but others were worried about preparing for the mixed gender environment at secondary school.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Ensure that current strategies are fully implemented before new initiatives are undertaken;
- Review the timetable in order to find collaboration time for staff during the school day so that consistency and professional learning related to improved student outcomes can be enhanced;
- Develop with staff, internal procedures to efficiently address student needs including the needs of new students to the school,
 - Explore ways, including the use of a roaming substitute teacher, to expedite school-based team meetings or the review of IEPs;

- Consider moving the kindergarten classroom into the primary area and using the space in the lower level to house woodworking and other applied skills activities;
- Explore flexible groupings, particularly for literacy and numeracy at the intermediate level in order to more effectively address the needs of those not meeting expectations as well as those meeting and/or exceeding expectations,
 - Flexible groupings would include mixing the genders which would prepare students for the mixed gender configuration in secondary school.

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 is very concerned about the academic success and social emotional development of all of the students. Although progress was noted as a result of the focus in the 2010-2011 plan, staff and School Council expressed concern related to the need to further improve achievement. Concerns were expressed for:
 - Those students who struggle with academic and social challenges and
 - Those students who are able to fully meet and/or exceed grade level expectations;
- Evidence from a variety of sources indicates that, in the area of academics, focusing on literacy across the curricula can have a significant impact on results on literacy skills as well as skills in numeracy and content areas;
- The School Growth Planning Team includes administration, staff, and School Council members and the plan is monitored on a consistent basis;
- The staff commented that the plan continues to be refined and focused to function as a road map for their work;
- Regarding evidence to guide decisions and actions at the classroom and school levels,
 - Staff members are increasingly using assessment for learning,
 - Engaging students in self-assessment appears to be in the early stages of development;
- Tracking student progress over time and evaluating the effectiveness of strategies used at the school will require disaggregating data to identify students who have recently come to the school and those who have remained at the school for several years.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Include students in the school growth process and improvement efforts at the school by making them aware of the goals of the school, seeking their input to monitor progress and having older students as ad hoc members of the School Growth Planning Team;
- Use student performance and social responsibility evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of the single gender classes;
- Continue to build staff capacity in the use of assessment for learning and emphasize the use of disaggregated data to explore the needs of sub-groups in the school;

- Work with staff to build student capacity to self-assess both academically and in the area of social responsibility.

Conclusions:

The positive start to the year provides the school with an opportunity to build on successful strategies currently being implemented to support social responsibility and academic success. The challenge for the school will be to deepen the work begun to ensure consistency and sustainability over time. With a continued narrow focus, processes to monitor progress and outstanding professional commitment of staff at the school, the Team is optimistic about the future.