



Teslin School Review Report April 2014

Teslin School
April 2014

School Principal: Dennis Darling

Date of Review: April 8-9, 2014

School Review Team:

Simon Blakesley, Director, Student Achievement and Systems Accountability, D of E
Silke Wissner, Principal, J.V. Clark School, Mayo, D of E
Nicole Morgan, Rural Coordinator for Alternative Learning, D of E
Bob Laking, AYSCBC
George Bahm, First Nations Experiential Advisor, FNPPU, D of E

Meetings with the School included:

The School Growth Planning Team
Teslin School Council
School administration
Teachers and support staff
Students
Elders

School Context

Teslin School serves approximately 43 Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 10 students in a rural setting. Almost all of the students (98%) are of aboriginal ancestry, with the majority being citizens of Teslin Tlingit Council (TTC). Teslin Tlingit Council maintains a very high level of involvement in the school, and is highly supportive of school programming and efforts to improve achievement of students and their levels of social responsibility.

The major philosophical change from an authority driven approach to a system that recognizes developmental concerns and human attachments and relationships as the primary motivators for children has been highly successful and is fully supported by administration, staff, parents, and the TTC. Relationships, attachments, restorative practices, culturally relevant programs and activities function as prerequisites to the overriding priority of academic achievement and success for every student.

The inclusion of Tlingit culture and traditions as a key belief system in the school continues to be a priority for educational programming through the integration of community norms with school events. This was clearly evidenced by the community's celebration of Teslin School's 50th Anniversary on April 14th, 2014, which included elders drumming as they led a parade through the community, a feast, dancing, and traditional games.

Student Outcomes Data

Attendance:

From September to December 2013, the average number of days a student is absent is 17.6 days. Eighteen of 43 students had missed more than 20 days. Eight students have IEPs.

Yukon Achievement Tests (YATs):

Grade 4:

- In reading, 3 did not participate or did not meet the expectations and 3 met or exceeded expectations (3 students participated);
- In writing, 5 did not participate or did not meet the expectations and 1 met or exceeded expectations;
- In mathematics, 3 did not participate or did not meet the expectations and 3 met or exceeded expectations.

Grade 7:

- In reading, 0 did not participate or did not meet the expectations and 4 met or exceeded expectations (4 students participated);
- In writing 2 did not participate or did not meet the expectations and 2 met or exceeded expectations;
- In mathematics 0 did not participate or did not meet the expectations and 4 met or exceeded expectations.

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:

- There is an evident, agreed upon philosophy based on trust, respect, and caring. *Ha Kus Teyea* – ‘Our Way’ is present in the philosophy of the school with respect to how everyone works together for the students at Teslin School
- The school exhibits a calm, friendly, and caring atmosphere where children are cared for in order to set the conditions for learning to take place
- There is the inclusion of Teslin Tlingit culture and language in all classes and activities, and people readily refer to each other using their Tlingit names
- The staff works as a team: they know their students, is cohesive, and displays positive attitudes and good relationships to actively model for students how to get along with each other
- Students of all ages work together and help each other. Restorative practices and consistency are approaches that help reinforce the calm, caring, family atmosphere created at the school
- Students are given choices on what they would like to do, and taking risks and trying new things is encouraged
- “Super Stars” and “Cool Kids” are two approaches taken to celebrate student successes at school

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue the successful integration of Tlingit language and culture throughout the school
- Find some way to formalize and “capture” your story over the past 6 years in order that other schools can learn from the approach to set the conditions for learning at Teslin School. This is particularly important given the principal transition taking place this year

School and 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:

- The strong relationship between the school and the Teslin Tlingit Council (TTC) is abundantly evident: the TTC Education Manager has her office next to the principal, and the TTC Director, Health and Social, is in regular communication with the principal
- There are elders in the school, working with students and staff members
- Making and sharing food together as a school and community is an approach with further helps to strengthen relationships
- Staff members are present in the community and are involved and visible in after-school extra-curricular activities and other community events
- The school is centrally located within the community
- School Council see the successes in the school once students begin attending in Kindergarten, but were wondering how students aged 0-4 may be supported to develop readiness and literacy skills

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue to work positively with the TTC Health and Social Department to explore ways in which pre-school students and their families may be supported in the development of readiness skills for school
- Continue to develop the already strong relationships that have been built between the school, the administration, the School Council, TTC, and the community that have led to the successful growth of the school

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:

- School administration and staff are supportive of student learning: for example, timetables have been arranged in such a way that teachers attend Tlingit Language classes with their students, with PE class being used for preparation time for teachers
- The .5 FTE PE position allows for students to go on ski trips and supports the organization of other sports activities and strengthens the relationship between the Village of Teslin and the community
- The team observed that there is no French program this year at Teslin School, though there has been in the past
- There is an emergent alternative high school program for students who wish to continue their studies in the community
- There is a “small school advantage” whereby new opportunities (performances, visitors, and other activities) can readily be capitalized upon to expand learning opportunities for students
- All students have one or more teachers with whom they have formed an attachment and can connect with as needed
- Project-based and experiential learning is employed in a number of classes, and assessment for learning informs the differentiated grouping of students
- From a physical perspective, having the TTC Education Manager’s office in the school’s main office next to the principal’s sends a very positive message to the community
- The team observed a valuable resource in the Industrial Education shop, particularly at a time when trade skills are in demand. There has been a focus placed on shop safety this year. The shop is now being used and maintained by one staff member, though the team wondered how it could be better supported by the Department of Education in order to provide more varied, in-depth learning opportunities for students

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Explore whether post-secondary language requirements could be met through accreditation given for Tlingit languages
- In collaboration with the School Council, define a clear model for high school programming at Teslin School: communicate this model to the community, and staff accordingly to meet the goals of the model
- Teachers could benefit from more collaborative time during the school day in order to share what they are doing and their best practices, particularly in respect to assessment for learning
- Explore with the Department more creative ways that the IE shop could be used safely as a resource for students in order that it can be better-utilized by staff who would like to expand what is offered to students

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 Pyramid of Intervention is used as a graphic organizer with all of the student's names on it as a means of identifying student needs and addressing them
- There is a consistency of values and practice- for example, all grade 1 students receive Reading Recovery™
- The School Growth Plan (SGP) is an agenda item at each staff meeting and School Council meeting. The Council knows what is in the SGP and feels informed by the principal with respect to its development. School growth goals are clearly informed by evidence from staff observations and other data sources
- The team noticed that the recommendations made in the 2010 School Review have been addressed in an on-going manner through the SGP process

- The move to assessment for/of/as learning is reflected in formative, anecdotal report cards with one summative grade at the end of the year. These have been well-received by staff and parents this school-year
- There is a strong capacity on School Council: The close working relationships between the principal and the School Council was evident to the team and has been central to the successes at Teslin School
- School assemblies are used as opportunities for staff and students to come together and share good news, announce and celebrate birthdays, and inform one another on current activities and upcoming events

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue to work to individualize education for all students through School Based Team meetings and with the expansion into high school programming that includes areas of interest/passion and personal growth for students
- Continue to use the School Growth Planning process to look ahead to where you need to grow to with a focus on academics, much the same as has been done with the focus on setting the conditions for learning at the school
- Once safety considerations in the shop are attended to, look forward to the development of an industrial education program in order to utilize facilities to their fullest, to the benefit of students

In conclusion

The team thoroughly enjoyed its visit to Teslin School. The team member who participated in the previous review commented on the thorough implementation of the recommendations provided in 2010. The continued growth and development of the relationships between the school, its staff, and the community have all contributed to the success that students achieve at Teslin School. While there are some concerns at the school and in the community with respect to the retirement of the current principal, the Review Team left feeling that the school serves as a model for other Yukon communities in the way that the school works both as a community and within the broader Teslin community.

Practices to share:

- The organization of the timetable so that teachers can attend Tlingit language classes with their students is very positive and innovative
- The focus on creating the conditions for learning through relationships, community supports, and a caring, restorative approach to working with students