



Robert Service School Review Report

Robert Service School

School Principal: Joe Karmel

Vice-Principal: Helen McCullough

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School Review Team:

Angie Charlebois, School Council member St. Elias

Val Collins, Literacy and Assessment Consultant DOE

Louise Fallon, French consultant DOE

Ruby Grant, Administrative Assistant First Nations Programs and Partnership Unit

Penny Prysruk, Superintendent Area 2

Katherine Mackwood, YTA President

Danielle Sheldon Coordinator, First Nations Programs and Partnership Unit

Judy Arnold Director DOE

Meetings at the School included:

- The School Growth Planning Team
- Representatives from Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
- Staff
- Students
- Classroom visits
- A telephone conversation with School Council representatives

School Context

Context:

Robert Service School (RSS) is a K--12 school in the heart of the Klondike in Dawson City, Yukon. Dawson City and the Klondike region is the traditional home of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Education Team works with the school to provide cultural programming, traditional knowledge experiences, and instruction in the Han language. RSS has a student population of approximately 200 students, 30% of whom have First Nations ancestry. The school maintains close partnerships with the local community, which provides diverse learning opportunities for students. The teachers and students are part of an active learning environment and students have many opportunities to travel across Yukon and Canada to participate in extra-curricular activities, sporting events, festivals, competitions, exchanges, field studies, and learning experiences of all kinds.

School 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:

- The atmosphere at the school is relaxed, warm, and welcoming.
- There is energy, optimism, and openness among staff and an eagerness to move forward to find new ways to provide opportunities for learners;
- Staff willingly volunteers for extra curricular activities at noon and after school;
- Students appear to be comfortable at the school and seem enjoy the opportunities provided,
 - Students expressed a desire for a Student Council that can take on leadership roles in the school;
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in representatives expressed a desire to be more closely involved in the school and several staff expressed an interest in enhancing curriculum through traditional knowledge, and First Nations studies,
 - Concern were expressed about the need to improve outcomes for First Nations students and the need to have First Nations perspectives and culture fully integrated across the curriculum;
- Although acknowledging that the number of students at the school affects programming and choices for students, the Team was concerned that current growth plan (as written) suggests that an overarching priority of the school is the “maintenance of a healthy student population size” rather than the articulation of a collectively held commitment to high expectations and continuous improvement for each learner.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Collectively develop a vision for and definition of success for each learner at Robert Service so that each learner is both challenged and supported to reach his or her personal potential,
 - Develop individual profiles and portfolios to assess progress,
 - Include the provision of resources and professional development,
 - Use student-base evidence that will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach and the impact on student learning;
- Work with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the First Nations Planning and Partnerships Unit (FNPPU) to integrate curricular outcomes and First Nations perspectives,
 - Review the suggested relationship-based restorative framework with staff and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in to determine its level of acceptance and applicability for students and staff at RSS.

School and Community

Characteristics: In continuously improving schools, there is a shared commitment to success for each learner. Relationships are developed and maintained to support students. Ongoing parent/community involvement is embedded in school culture. The school collaborates and communicates in multiple ways about the work to support student learning. Input and dialogue is actively sought and valued.

Observations of the Team:

- The staff at the school has good relationships among themselves, with the community and many parents.
 - Community connections are a strength at the school
- The school council is positive about the school and has a good working relationship with the administration
- There is collaborative approach at the school, leadership is distributed, and staff commented favourably on the reduction in behavioral issues and suspensions at the school
- Staff appreciates the use of the short day on Wednesday to work collaboratively on a variety of committees and would appreciate more opportunities to function as professional learning communities. Committees in place include social justice, health and safety, and a committee for each goal area in the growth plan
- Good news assemblies are held on an ongoing basis to celebrate successes at the school
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the school are in ongoing dialogue about strategies and supports that have the potential to promote culturally responsive programming for First Nations Students
- The Team commends the school for reaching out to the community to find ways to enhance opportunities for students through an emerging vision of Robert Service as a northern hub,
 - Such a hub could provide pre-apprenticeship, applied skills, and technological opportunities for Robert Service students as well as students in Yukon rural areas,
 - The hub has the potential to engage students and reduce the drop out rates,
 - The staff suggested that some of the strategies related to creating a technology and applied skills rural leaning hub would have the potential to attract rural students from other areas and encourage RSS students to stay at the school rather than moving to Whitehorse at the secondary level,
 - However, senior students suggested that many leave the school in the secondary years and go to Whitehorse not just for academic or technological opportunities but for sports and social connections;
- Staff appreciates the work of the CELCs at the school. However, the CELCs find that being largely excluded from staff meetings leaves them unclear about events, directions and areas of concern or focus at the school;
- Discussions with staff indicated that the new school growth process as an ongoing collective evidence-based dialogue among staff, CELCs, school council, parents, First

Nations and community about improving student outcomes appears to be in the very early stages.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Maintain and deepen the collaborative Wednesday committee work and explore the school timetable to find ways to enhance collaborative time particularly between the elementary and secondary teachers;
- Further develop the professional learning community approach, which includes the use of a variety of qualitative, quantitative evidence to support the work;
- In order to include CELCs more fully in the work of the school, format the agenda for staff meetings so that issues related to confidentiality or YTA business are at the end of the meeting Strengthen the dialogue with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in,
 - As suggested by administration a more central location in the school would help facilitate connections to parents, administration and community;
- Work with the Department within the context of the rural strategy to explore the potential of a rural hub focusing on applied skills at RSS,
 - Use evidence from RSS and other schools to create a baseline profile of students, including those who are at risk of dropping out or who return to school to participate, who take advantage of the program, which can be compared to similar data sets after the program is implemented to assess efficacy,
 - In relation RSS, make sure the school has a thorough understanding about why students leave the school whether it is to go to school in Whitehorse or drop out,
 - An exit survey for all student who leave secondary school would provide insight into the programs or strategies that may keep student at the school;
- Continue to encourage the involvement of local partners, parents, First Nations and Elders in the school to support student learning;
- Ensure that students, staff, parents, First Nations, and school council are involved in the school growth process so that all voices are heard and understood as the school charts new directions.

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:

- There is a focus on the provision of a wide variety of experiences and opportunities for students including local national and international travel experiences, sports and extra curricular activities arts, music and experiential opportunities;
- At the secondary level, mathematics has been taught using a Promethean board and students have used rubrics and self-assessment to measure progress. Early evidence appears to show improved understanding and achievement in relation to expected outcomes;
- Staff suggested the need for more consistency of approach to literacy development which includes the use of performance standards;
- The structure of the school lends itself to having separate elementary and secondary areas in the school. In the past this has created a divide among the staff and although it was noted that there has been a lot of improvement in this regard over the past of couple years,
 - Some staff suggested that more connections between elementary and secondary teachers to create a consistent continuum of learning and expectations,
 - A few staff expressed concern that having grade 7's with the secondary students may not be conducive to their success,
- The school will have a new intensive French program next year. References to the program were made by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in representative wondering about the possibility of a similar or parallel approach being developed for First Nations language and cultural development;
- Staff suggested the exploration of a variety of creative or innovative approaches including:
 - Not having a computer class but instead having computers as a tool each the classroom,
 - Scheduling classes more efficiently through the year to balance timetable,
 - Considering aligning calendars and schedules across the territory to be able to participate in classes from other schools. For example: the science class with Dave Brown from Porter Creek,
 - Trying to develop more credit courses that are traditional-based,
 - Offering a tutorial approach with an open schedule (even during evenings)
- Staff expressed concerns about the amount of travel time and the loss of student contact time when participating in professional development in Whitehorse and suggested that professional development be provided at the school
 - Staff also suggested that visits from Department consultant visits should be distributed throughout the year with a focus on initial visits early in the fall

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Consistent with current research related to how students learn (Hattie, 2009), the use of formative assessment to guide classroom practice, student self-assessment supported by differentiated and or individualized instruction must be a high priority at the school;
- Use both formative and summative assessment understand student needs and assess the incremental progress of students that struggle as well as those who are strong and need to be challenged;
- Work with other schools as a hub or as part of the comprehensive rural strategy evaluates the current school calendar as it pertains student flexibility, choice, and virtually joining classes among schools;
- Work with Department to organize professional development opportunities at the school and schedule consultant visits throughout the year;
- Students who have inconsistent attendance have a hard time catching up with work
- As per legislation, ensure that 20% of the curriculum is local with a focus on First Nations.

School Processes and Progress

Characteristics: Improving schools improve 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:

- It was evident to the Team that the current draft school growth plan is an amalgam of the previous plan and reflections on some excellent ideas for future directions;
- For 2010-20112 school year, the school honored their commitment to the previous school growth process, which included a three-year plan beginning in 2008. As a result, the new school growth process with its ongoing approach as described in current policy and guidelines has yet to be implemented.

Additionally:

- Evidence, formative and summative, from physical, social, emotional or academic sources is not consistently analyzed and reflected upon to determine directions, measure progress or determine the effectiveness of strategies currently in place
- Staff, students, parents, First Nation, CELCs, parents and school council are not engaged in the new school growth process

Recommendations for moving forward:

- As the school moves to the new school growth process, follow the policy and guidelines as described by the Department,
 - Use evidence in a meaningful way to guide decisions, classroom practice and measure student progress,
 - Disaggregate evidence by subgroups to explore ways to engage students, reduce dropouts, improve outcomes, and challenge strong learners
 - Use evidence consistently to determine the effectiveness of the creative and innovative approaches that the staff is eager to attempt,
 - Engage all partners in the process to build commitment,
 - Communicate regularly about progress and celebrate successes;
- Given the eagerness of staff to be creative and innovative, an action research approach where goals and objectives are stated as student focused research questions may be a strategy that helps the school embrace the new school growth process.

Conclusions:

With the energy, enthusiasm, and creative capacity at the school, the Review Team is confident that the use of the school growth process to create a clearly articulated, evidence-based road map will lead to a bright future for all Robert Service students.

Practices to share:

- The focus on applied skills
- The use of the promethean board for secondary mathematics