

Tantalus School Review Report

DRAFT

School Tantalus

Date: March 2012

School Principal: Kevin Foley

Date of Review: February 14- 16, 2012

School Review Team:

Jim Boyde Department of Education

Cyndy Bekk School Council, Del Van Gorder

Maggie Mann, Principal, St. Elias Community School

Penny Prysruk, Superintendent Area 2, Department of Education

Judy Arnold, Director, Department of Education

Meetings with the School included:

- The principal
- Staff
- Students
- School Council representatives
- Classroom visits

School Context

Tantalus school is a newer building, located in the village of Carmacks. Carmacks is home to many Northern Tutchone citizens and neighbours the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. There are approximately 113 students at the school from kindergarten to grade 12. The school has had a number of administrators. The current mission of the school states that Tantalus Hats Edan Ku prepares students to contribute, self-sufficient and self-confident members of society... and that programs reflect the Northern Tutchone values of caring, sharing, and respect.

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 a newer building, a good size for the current student population, with an interesting external design. However, for a newer building, the school needs some cosmetic repairs a thorough cleaning, art, and student work to create a warm welcoming atmosphere reflective of First Nations culture;
- All staff and the school council had a focus on the students and their learning but commented that the lack of consistent leadership over the last few years has led to an inconsistent vision of what the school is, should and could be,
 - Staff, school council and students were eager to have long term consistent leadership in place that will bring staff and community together to develop a collective vision for the school with high standards, and a sense of team;
- The school has access to significant community resources and the outdoor education potential is unlimited,
 - Interagency support is excellent including RCMP, social services, and nurses;
- Students were polite and respectful but commented on bullying at the school and lack of consistent approach to behaviour and suggested that boys like to play, girls work hard,
 - Staff suggested there were issues related to cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and theft.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Work with staff, students, School Council First Nation, and community to create a new vision for the school that focuses on working together, supporting the conditions for learning and high expectations for each student;
- Use the artistic skills of students and staff to create a warm, welcoming and culturally relevant environment for staff and students at the school, Secure the return of the school mascot, the cougar;
- Use a focus on social responsibility and social justice to develop an approach to behaviour and social issues that is consistent across the school and restorative rather than punitive i.e. ensure that strategies used do not include physically handling students or completing meaningless repetitive tasks,
 - The use of the social responsibility performance standards and the development of classroom and school-wide criteria with students and staff could form a foundational part of the 2012-2013 school growth plan,
 - An essential component of the process will be modeling expectations for students and having the community understand the procedures;
- Work with the Department to resolve the facilities issues including in the elementary wing raising coat hangers so coats do not fall on the floor and in the secondary the installation of lockers so that students do not have to carry coats and heavy backpacks from class to class with them during the day.

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:

- Staff appears to work well in smaller groups i.e. the secondary team. All staff look forward to the development of a school-wide collaborative team approach to learning and in-school professional development;
 - Staff felt strongly that they needed collaborative time to focus on moving forward in the work. However, no professional learning community (PLC) work was noted;
- Staff commented that parent involvement appeared to be increasing but that communications between the home and school need further development;
- School Council indicated that they want high standards for academics at the school. School Council also noted that given the fact that there would be new leadership at the school for the 2012-2013 year, they wanted someone who would be,
 - Involved in the community and function as a team player,
 - Willing to stay on for a number of years,
 - Focused on the positives at the school with the strength to take on the issues that need to be addressed;
- The Team noted a need for students to take on leadership roles at the school including a student council;
- Staff and School Council was not involved in the school growth process or the development of the 2011-2012 School Growth Plan;

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Ensure that staff are involved in structured collaboration focused on the use of evidence and classroom-based strategies;
- Strengthen efforts to reach out to parents as volunteers, as decision makers and as partners in student learning. This includes liaising with the First Nations government and,
 - Organizing workshops for parents so that they understand the work of the school to improve student outcomes,
 - Accessing the community to support experiential and on the land opportunities,
 - Considering community planning day(s).

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:

- The Team observed the considerable talents and skills of the school staff. Staff commented that sports, shop, creative activities and some clubs are returning to the school and students are very appreciative;
- The school was successfully reorganized in the fall to more readily meet the needs of the students;
- There is a focus on literacy and numeracy at the elementary level and the conditions for learning at secondary,
 - Some staff are using criteria referenced assessment (Performance Standards) as well as student self-assessment,
 - It was suggested that a consistent approach to the development of literacy skills i.e. the use of six plus one writing traits would help the development of literacy skills;
- The geography of the area lends itself to an experiential approach for the students to address prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) and meeting the needs of both struggling and capable learners,
- Many of the historic data entry issues related to student grades have been resolved, however, although most of the Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have now been entered into the system, there does not appear to be a consistent approach to School Based Team or the management of IEPs.
 - Additionally, there needs to be clarity around the roles of Educational Assistants (EAs) and Learning Assistance Teachers (LATs) at the school.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Consider the talents and skills of the staff when organizing the school for 2012-2013;
- Move toward a consistent approach to the development of literacy skills at the school which includes a foundation of balance and the use of the performance standards, assessment for learning and student self-assessment,
- Work with the Department and community to develop a vision for experiential learning including on the land and shop or applied skills approaches,
 - Use experiential as a way to enhance student engagement and improved achievement;
- Explore distance education or virtual learning and the use of technology for the more capable secondary students at the school;
- Organize school based team and have processes and procedures for meetings and keeping records in place and understood by staff, School Council and community.

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:

- A significant pattern of absence was evident particularly at the secondary level;
 - Staff and school council were also very concerned about the literacy and numeracy levels of the students and the number of students dropping out at the secondary level;
- The collective use of evidence to guide decision and actions is in the early stages of development as is the collective use of assessment for and as learning;
- Staff and school council had limited involvement in the development of the 2011-2012 growth plan;
- The Team also noted that the current school growth plan was too broad and unfocused to function as a genuine road map for the improvement of student achievement.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Ensure that staff, students, and school council are involved in the process to develop the 2012-2013 school growth plan,
 - Use evidence in discussions to determine the area of focus,
 - Limit goals and objectives to the one or two most important priorities,
 - Ensure that strategies address the learning needs of all students especially those who are capable and need to be challenged as well as those that struggle,
 - Engage with the Department to provide professional development to support staff;
- Evaluate why students are absent or drop out of the school and then work with students, staff, and parents to design strategies to reengage the learners.

Conclusions:

The Team was very pleased to note that the staff and School Council were willing and eager to move forward, function as a team and support improved outcomes for each student at the school. Given the current situation at the school, and the fact that there will be new leadership for the 2012-2013 school year the Team recommends that another school review be held in the spring of 2013.

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