



School Inquiry Project Application (2021-2022)

School: North Island Secondary

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In what ways will improving the understanding of SEL (Social Emotional Learning) of our staff improve the social emotional well-being and academic outcomes of our students at NISS?

1. Scanning:

- What's going on for your learners? How do you know?
- What are we seeing working in our school?
- What is your baseline data?

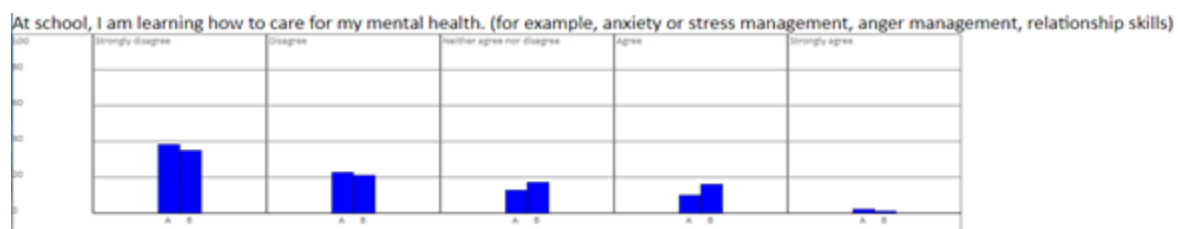
NISS will be embarking on a new inquiry project this year. In general, we hope to cast a wide net on the issues regarding social emotional learning and wellbeing for both staff and students. In March 2020, Canada with the rest of the world was met with overwhelming news of a pandemic. As BC transformed education from in class to online, teachers had little choice but to teach from home and students had little choice but to learn from home. However, the primary concern for many educators was not just learning, but also the mental health of our students. Daily conversations took place concerning our most vulnerable youth. These concerns eventually spread to the overall student body. As a staff, we became increasingly aware of the high rates at which students were not showing up for online education, despite problem solving many issues regarding the accessibility of technology. With increasing concerns regarding tracking all students, we noticed attendance rates decreasing and the effects of isolation became increasingly clear. Stress, domestic violence, and mental health are on the rise and this was no different among our students. Our already isolated community became further isolated and the effects, although not entirely immediate, would begin to expose a deeper need for greater mental health and wellness awareness. Humans are wired within their genetic code to be social, to form attachment to family, community and beyond. Initiatives such as social distancing would disrupt a natural biological construct within our own human nature, thus causing stress or trauma; this biological construct was intensified by the age of our students. This was not the only issue brought about by Covid but it was the foundational problem that many people struggled with. Although the messaging of social distancing spanned throughout the province, educators soon had the difficult task of bridging elements of the health and safety of Covid within the school and the mental health factors that were

impacted due to the changes. As time continued, we also became aware that many of our students had the extraordinary task of being the essential workers within our community (working at the grocery store, food delivery and caretaking for family members with weakened immune systems). It became clear the effects of the pandemic were more than just social and additional stress was being placed on many youth everywhere. Students required additional support to handle the stress and trauma that the pandemic had caused. Exposing students to SEL would be a powerful tool against the social emotional implications of Covid.

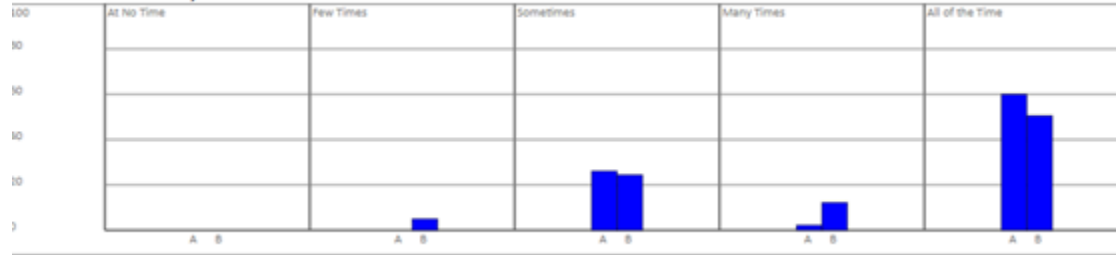
2. Focusing:

- Where does your focus need to be? Why is this important?
- Where would you concentrate your focus to change the results and the experience of your learners?
- What will have the biggest impact?

The 2020-21 school year began with a strategy for building a compassionate system of leadership and promoting mental health and well-being awareness. We attempted to target the topic of mental health with our students through zoom workshops, presenters such as Kerri Isham, Learning Through Loss, individual mental health counsellors, and group sessions to help students' mental health and wellbeing. However, after a quick survey with a small group of students regarding the importance of mental health and wellness within an educational setting, it was acknowledged that students do not fully understand the reason or value in holding such knowledge. Students saw mental health and awareness as something that was required by those experiencing a mental health crisis. The group found this interesting; how did students gain such a misconception about mental health and wellbeing? Looking back at all those initiatives, we had promoted mental health or SEL but had somehow failed to engage students in its importance. This was supported from data collected by our own school survey as shown:



Does school make you feel stressed or anxious?



The focus then demanded a shift in perspective. That shift began by looking inwards towards the educators first and their understanding of SEL and where it might fit into the curriculum. Thus, a new focus began to emerge for next year, strengthening the understanding of health and wellness among staff through different psychoeducational opportunities. Our new guiding principle then became leadership begins with modeling.

Primary Focus Areas

The primary focus areas come from the Ministry of BC's Mental Health in Schools (MHIS) Strategy and the role educators and schools play in implementing the plan.

Strengthening a compassionate system of Leadership:

The primary focus will begin on strengthening a compassionate system of leadership among all staff members at our school. We will concentrate on growing the opportunity for creating and understanding empathy through psychoeducational opportunities and SEL with the goal that growing staff's knowledge on topics such as stress and self-care will increase wellness for all.

Social-emotional learning is a process that helps us to:

- Feel and show empathy for others
- Develop healthy identities
- Manage emotions
- Set and achieve goals
- Build relationships
- Make responsible and caring decisions
- Process or remember information
- Communication
- Mental Health Promotion

An additional focus of this project will be promoting mental health by extending psychoeducational opportunities to include a holistic approach to mental health and well-being. Topics such as trauma-informed practice and

Adapted from Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser *"Spirals of Inquiry: For Equity and Quality"*

incorporating beliefs from local First Nations, Kwak'waka speaking people, will also provide additional perspectives to the practice of mental health," Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)."

It is with purpose that the effects of the inquiry project will be measured slowly, starting first by measuring the impact on educators and then students. Starting with educators will allow for information to reach a wide range of classes and students. Breaking the hidden stigma within our own building will begin to create an even safer environment for all students within the school. Change must happen with us first.

3. Developing a Hunch:

- What's leading to this situation? (Focus on the areas over which educators have control- not parents, the system or the learner)

Much of what is leading the inquiry process this year has been Covid. However, we also believe that much of what we are seeing with the mental health and well-being of our students has been there the entire time. Covid was just the spark that began to expose the true nature of mental health of our students. We see students wanting more messaging, more information, demanding more accessibility to mental health topics and professionals in an already overwhelmingly overloaded system. However, as educators we have no control over the above areas. Where we do have control is within our own ability to act as leaders and how we discuss, model and promote mental health and well-being in our classroom. Educators have the power to offer knowledge and guidance. We hope that these changes will begin to connect youth, increase attendance, engagement, better marks and more confident and connected learners. In addition, we can gain a better baseline from scales such as the professional quality of life scale (PROQOL).

4. Professional Learning:

- What do the professionals in your building need to learn? How will this learning occur? What resources can you access? How will you build in multiple opportunities for learning?

Professionals within the building will need to learn the practice of self-reflection and how SEL will positively impact their own life and their professional work. The resources we have include our baseline data from the professional quality of life scale which professionals will use as a starting off point in their own reflection. Additionally, the largest resource we have is each other. As much as stress can be contagious, so too can promoting social emotional health and well-being.

As the school motto states, "Our central focus is to enable all learners to fulfill their potential." We strive to foster a strengths-based approach, utilizing the surrounding environment and support from our learning partners to build confidence and a positive sense of identity. We believe that continued professional growth focused on embedded SEL across subject areas will help address our focus.

5. Taking Action:

- What are you doing about it?
- What will staff do differently? How will you know if it's working?
(Incorporate the 3 levels of Response To Intervention)
- What are the roles of Teachers, Support Staff, Principals and Vice-Principals in the inquiry?
 - Staff are partnering up with students to learn specific skills and knowledge.
 - We host monthly SEL meetings (First Monday of each Month) where we invite, staff, students and community members to establish plans, goals and actions
 - Teachers will continue to look for opportunities for SEL learning to occur. This may include but is not limited to: guided lessons on topics of SEL; community presentations, and promotion of self-care through outdoor based education.
 - We will publish through newsletter, blog, and other social media platforms useful Social emotional tools and SEL tips.
 - Teachers will identify and promote connections to First Peoples Principles of Learning.
 - We will develop staff and student initiatives such as setting goals,
 - Teachers and the Vice-Principal and Principal, with the support of the First Nation Connection and Support Workers, will involve classes in SEL.
 - Classes such as foods, outdoors, PE, could rotate through sponsoring a wellness activity (such as a meditation in the garden, yoga, stretching, healthy snacks) for each "Wellness Wednesday". Teachers will brainstorm more ideas.

6. Checking:

- Have you made enough of a difference? What evidence will you be seeking to know you are making a difference?
 - When will you check in and how often?
 - How can you do it in a way that allows for immediate adjustment?

We will use a variety of ways to assess if we are making a difference. We will be looking for the following evidence:

- #s of staff and students involved in decision making in regards to SEL

Adapted from Dr. Judy Halbert and Dr. Linda Kaser *"Spirals of Inquiry: For Equity and Quality"*

- Positive change in the Professional Quality of Life Scale
- More diverse groups meeting together for a common purpose (Basketball, LART, Foods, Careers, Outdoor Ed. Shops, Languages)
- More students taking on individual roles
- More civic engagement by hosting a special event to showcase what was learned
- Students take more ownership and responsibility for their surroundings
- Elders involved in learning experiences which build community
- Student attendance records indicate less absences {MCFD interview}

7. Itemize Your Budget Request:

\$1000 TTOC expenses

\$3000 Staff workshops, food, materials supplies

\$500 - professional learning resources

\$250 gifts for community volunteers who lead learning activities

\$2000 Wellness materials

Total requested \$6750

Signatures:

School Principal

Staff Rep

(VINTA, CUPE)