



School Inquiry Project Application (2021-2022)

School: Port Hardy Secondary

School Team: Jillian Walkus

Question: To what extent will school-wide activities improve the school community, spirit and respect among staff and students?

Scanning: What's going on for your learners? How do you know? What student achievement evidence are you looking at? What is your baseline data?

Last year, we were not able to complete all tasks and inquiry as planned as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, although we could see the beginning of positive changes in attitude toward school. We have decided to slightly amend our inquiry question to expressively give students more agency and more voice. School belonging and a sense of purpose are both collective and individual. We wanted to express this in our inquiry question.

The pandemic has restricted school-wide activities to "doing the same thing, but all in different rooms". However, some activities still increased well being and positive feelings about our school community. At the same time, we noticed that engagement is an important expression of the feeling of belonging, and especially during the last months of the pandemic, we have lost engagement from many of our students. That is expressed in skipping, substance use during school and coming "under the influence" and staying at home for part of the day or the whole day, as a choice. We want to counter this very concerning trend and focus on activities that increase student engagement in class and out. We want our students to have a sense of purpose in school and feel their contribution to the PHSS community.

Student disengagement is not new. Staff observed what appears to be a lack of school spirit and sense of belonging for many students. There are students who are physically present in the school building but are not attending their classes. A consequence of student absenteeism is course failure. Students that attend class participate in more instruction and guided practice, and are therefore more successful with course work. A sense of school belonging has been documented as a predictor of academic and psychosocial success. We also observed that the level of participation in interactive school-wide events, such as theme days and student council assemblies, is low. These activities are aimed at engaging and including all students in the school community, and we believe students at present are not getting the benefit of a sense of belonging in their school unless we increase our focus in this area.

During the 2018/19 school year, students attended a daily homeroom Monday through Thursday. Classes were made up of multi-graded groups to allow students to build connections across the grades and to provide older students with mentorship opportunities. Mornings began with announcements, and then moved into a discussion or activity often related to a theme connected to core competencies. For 2019/20, homeroom was reduced to one morning per week and the majority of teaching staff felt this resulted in decreased attendance to homeroom as well as student engagement and sense of belonging.

Because we are continuing with a similar inquiry from our previous years, we will use the baseline data of 2018/19 to 2020/21 attendance reports, marks, and student council reports from school activities. We will also use anecdotal evidence based on survey results, including grade 12 exit surveys, and the answers from the Student Learning Survey. We want to add student empathy interviews to get a richer picture.

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?

Our focus will be on the students' sense of belonging and engagement within the school and the classroom. Educators know that having a sense of belonging has a positive impact on individual academic and social emotional success. We believe that a sense of belonging will improve engagement and a sense of purpose. We strive to increase engagement and inclusion by asking our students for more feedback and input. Our baseline data shows that students who have a higher absentee rate are more likely to have lower grades. Being successful in school means passing classes and graduating within 5-6 years of beginning grade 8. Students that attend class receive more guidance and support and are therefore more successful in their courses and more likely to achieve graduation within the 5-6 year goal.

The PHSS mission statement refers to developing "a sense of self through engaging learning experiences". The staff will work together to provide engaging learning experiences in the classroom and they will work with the student body to provide engaging learning experiences within the school as a whole that will contribute to a sense of ownership on the part of the students. We believe that a focus on the Core Competencies in every class will allow for conversation about purpose and agency. Informal anecdotal evidence will give us information about the depth of these discussions. In addition to classroom learning we want to add "learning bursts" that address issues of well-being and mental health. With the students being involved in creating the engagement activities, we anticipate greater involvement and sense of belonging on the part of the students.

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)

Absenteeism, even legitimate absence, has a negative impact on student achievement. Gaps in knowledge/learning result from past absenteeism and compound student frustration. We have found that students in grades 8 and 9 who in the past had more consistent attendance, have shown very concerning tendencies to misuse substances, skip and show disengagement to the point of refusing support, counseling or discussing alternate plans. We want to change this pattern, by sharing strategies among staff that promote a sense of belonging, student engagement, and responsibility for learning in the younger students. We think that students who have a sense of belonging within the school community will have greater desire to be at school. We believe that if students have a sense of purpose they will want to contribute and have an increased sense of well being at school. This will lead to better attendance and subsequently improved successes in the classroom.

There are many possible reasons why students choose not to attend class. It is our belief that some students do not see the relevance or value in the skills and content being taught in the classroom or they do not find the school or classroom as a fun and engaging environment and therefore choose not to attend. We hypothesize that student engagement suffers when students think the work is too easy or moving too slow; when they are not interested in the subject or topic; if they find the work is too difficult or moving too fast and they get overwhelmed; or if they do not feel a sense of comfort and belonging in the school building and/or classrooms. We will conduct empathy interviews with 25 students to more deeply explore reasons for skipping vs attending classes to increase engagement. We will invite all students to give us written responses to a "google form" to questions about their experience with school and reasons for choices they make.

Student engagement at school can be further impacted by reasons outside of the educators' control, including student or family belief that school is not important; past patterns of interaction between school and home (rooted in colonialism); and family/personal life challenges, including a lack of sleep or nutrition. Over the past year we have witnessed how trauma and tragedy have increased stress and overt self-destructive behaviors in our students. Recent deaths in the community, as well as the devastating discovery of the mass grave at the Kamloops residential school, have deeply impacted staff and students. While we do not have direct control over some of the aforementioned reasons, through our interactions with students and our planning of differentiated lessons we can strengthen our students collectively to mitigate some of the effects. Educators in their classes can control how they plan and deliver lessons, support and promote school policies, their own interactions with students, and their own participation in school-wide activities. As a school, we

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can and will decide to have our students' voices heard and to ask them for feedback in order to foster school belonging.

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?

Our plan was to increase staff teamwork and participation. However, due to the cohort model that was restricted to (three) teachers, teaching the same cohort. In the upcoming year, staff will work together, to deliver relevant and engaging lessons.

Secondly, staff will have the opportunity at our September Inservice Day, to collaboratively plan for making lessons as relevant as possible. During the past year of remote and blended learning, staff cooperation and learning from each other has increased. We want to keep this momentum going. We will plan together how to extend learning into the community. We can't wait to once again invite more community members to come into our school (eg, First Nations role models), to share their learning with students. We have felt the absence of elders in our midst. Learning is a deeply social process; and we want to strengthen learning by modelling and supporting social connections. We will build upon the success of our last two Health Conferences. These day-long events allowed many community agencies to offer workshops on topics requested by students. These topics included self care, sports nutrition, art therapy, and information on addiction. Students and staff took part together in a day of learning, and we closed the event with an active, fun competition in the gym. This year, we had to offer smaller, more distributed workshops within COVID guidelines. However, we found that even with the changed format, students were hungry for Mental Health and Wellbeing workshops. 272 students signed up for a total of 10 workshops. We intend to host similar events in 2021/22. We hope to continue the theme of mental health and self-esteem with a presentation by Green Thumb Theatre in the spring of 2022. This will be a learning experience for both students and staff.

It is our intent that a team of two teachers attend the NOIE conference in the 2021/22 school year, and work with the staff upon their return to share strategies learned to further motivate and engage students.

Taking Action: What are you doing about it? What will staff do differently? How will you know if it's working? What are the roles of Teachers, Support Staff, Principals and Vice-Principals in the inquiry?

The goal of our inquiry is to improve students' overall engagement and sense of belonging in the school. We expect that achieving this goal will result in a more positive and respectful school environment and improved attendance and

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marks for students. Staff previously expressed an interest in returning to 4 days a week with homerooms as they were in 2018/19. However, the impact of COVID restrictions this year allowed us to try different activities, such as grade cohort field trips and health and wellness afternoons. As a result, we found an increased sense of belonging with the cohort. In 2021/22, we are planning to expand on these activities (Field Trips, several Wellness events, rather than one big event) to foster the sense of belonging within the grade groups. Our time table for next year reflects this focus on the cohorts. We see this as a transitional step towards a sense of belonging in the school, starting with a sense of belonging in a smaller group.

Student Council has run a number of events and assemblies at PHSS over the years. The 2020/21 school year did not have a Student Council, but events were still organized by administration and individual cohort groups. There was also the introduction of sports groups this year. Staff volunteered as coaches and joined students after school hours to play a wide variety of sports with the understanding that students needed to be attending class and completing assignments if they wanted to participate. Coaches identified a number of students for whom these extracurricular activities provided incentive for class attendance. Similar events and activities will continue in 2021/22 to offer students more opportunities to participate in non-academic ways and feel that sense of belonging at PHSS. We hope to revive a multi grade Student Council next year. We want to give them increased weight by providing both a budget and a meeting room to foster student agency and increase student voice.

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 be using attendance data, student engagement surveys, empathy interviews and anecdotal evidence from both students and staff. Engagement surveys will be conducted twice a year to get student input on the activities they participated in and on activities they would like to see in the future. Specific events, such as health and wellness workshops may be surveyed individually. Attendance records and report cards will provide the evidence of whether or not our strategy has worked to improve student engagement. Their sense of belonging will be reflected in their attendance as the attendance is expected to improve if the student feels like they belong. Anecdotal evidence from students and staff will also be used as evidence regarding the sense of belonging of all students.

Itemize Your Budget Request:

- Inquiry conference - NOIE
- Time in lieu for staff working on inquiry and staff collaboration time
- Coverage for teachers conducting student empathy interviews

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- Day planners for students (for those students whose teachers or case managers recommend them)
- Attendance rewards (for individuals and/or homerooms)
- Contest prizes (for homeroom or cohort challenges)
- Health workshop incentives (food) and prizes (
- \$845 Green Thumb Theatre performance (mental health, spring 2022)
- Sports events and prizes
- September in-service (collaborative lesson and field trip planning)

Signatures:

School Principal

Staff Rep

(VINTA, CUPE)