



**Eliza Van Bibber School
Review Report
November 2015**

Eliza Van Bibber School Review November 2015

School Principal: John Duclos

Date of Review: November 25/26, 2015

School Review Team:

Simon Blakesley, Director, Student Achievement/System Accountability, Yukon Education
Cory Bellmore, Tantalus School Council and LSCFN Representative, Carmacks
René Dove, First Nations Curriculum Consultant, FNPP, Yukon Education
Peter Giangrande, Vice-principal, Porter Creek Secondary School, Yukon Education
Angela Magon, Principal, Del Van Gorder School, Faro, Yukon Education

Meetings with the School included:

- All students Grade 3 and higher
- All teachers and support staff
- School Council/SFN representatives
- School Administration

School Context

Eliza Van Bibber School is a rural school with a population of approximately 45 students that offers a Learning Together Program to Grade 12. 91% of the students in Eliza Van Bibber School are identified as First Nations. In 2014-2015 a full day kindergarten program partially funded by the Learning Together Program was initiated. The school is located in the community of Pelly Crossing, Yukon, approximately 285km north of Whitehorse.

In the fall of 2014, almost the entire teaching staff was new at Eliza Van Bibber School. As a result there was a refocus in the direction of the school, with emphasis placed on creating progressive Individual Education Plans, positive Behaviour Plans, specific Student Learning Plans, and comprehensive Safety Plans for students. This focus allowed the creation of a positive and supportive learning environment for our students and school as a whole.

The School's Vision

There has been the collective development of a new vision of Eliza Van Bibber School (EVBS) which includes many stakeholders in Pelly Crossing: parents, community Elders, the Chief and Council, Selkirk First Nation Administration, community members, and all school staff. This vision includes programming that will enhance success by investing in our students to be able to independently assess and take charge of their learning. Emphasis has been placed on the development a system of supports and programing to keep our students engaged in their education and develop relationship skills through positive interaction.

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 Team observed a very warm, welcoming, calm, and friendly learning environment at Eliza Van Bibber School (EVBS). The students with whom the Team interacted were polite and friendly, with the majority sharing with the Team that they were happy and proud to be attending EVBS
- Since the last review, there has been an almost complete change of staff and School Council at EVBS. There appears to be a new energy with fresh ideas, a diversity of talent, and a commitment to work together. As a result, the previous review has become more of a historical document of a time and context that no longer exists
- While not directly involved in the previous review, it appeared clear to the Team that the school staff has moved forward in the last three years with respect to creating a culture of learning and a focus on academic achievement for students
- There appears to be a philosophy of behaviour that is consistent and focused on restorative rather than punitive practice. Office referrals for behavioural incidents appears to be reduced
- The majority of students shared with the Team that they like their teachers and know that they are there to help them with their learning. Many students expressed that they have trust in their teachers, and that school is a fun, happy, and supportive place in which to learn. This said, the Team did hear from some students who felt that they did not have an adult in the school that they could go to if they were experiencing personal problems
- Some students shared that bullying was going on at times. Despite students having participated in making the five steps to addressing bullying poster in the front foyer and awareness of anti-bullying programming in the school, several students stated they were not satisfied with the steps that had been made to address current bullying of some students
- A number of staff members shared with the Team on numerous occasions that there is a supportive, trusting atmosphere of cooperation amongst staff, and a willingness to help and cover for each other on an as-required basis. There is evidence of collaboration and solution-focused discussions taking place amongst staff
- The Team heard from some staff that they may not feel as appreciated for their volunteer or additional contributions to the broader school program. Based on this, the Team

wondered whether there were open conversations amongst all staff regarding volunteerism and what was expected of them in terms of volunteer contributions

- While there is a very open and relaxed atmosphere at EVBS, the Team wondered about locked doors and closed at the school, and the need to have a high level of security in the building

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue the focus on strengthening the learning culture at the school in order to ensure that students succeed and are on a path to high school graduation
- In the aim of fostering increased sharing of thoughts, observations, and ideas, consider ways that students and staff can contribute input and comments regarding school operations anonymously in ways that remove any potential for anxiety
- Seek ways to recognize and celebrate the many contributions of staff. Give thought to ensure that volunteer efforts are distributed and balanced amongst staff as appropriate
- Be aware that there are some students who do not currently feel high levels of personal trust with staff. Explore ways to identify the reasons behind lower levels of trust and reach out to students to foster relationships and to build trust
- As a staff, continue to work consistently to support and reinforce students in strategies that help to deal with and eliminate bullying

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:

- There exists an expectation amongst the staff that fostering relationships and connections to the broader community is an important goal at EVBS. Current staff expressed their desire to have more local First Nations teachers working at the school in the future
- Reflecting back on the 2012 review, the Team heard that there are stronger, more supportive relationships in place with the Selkirk First Nation (SFN), the EVBS School Council, CELC, and between the school and the community. Overall, the Team heard

that there has been a shift in culture whereby these partners now work more closely together in support of student learning, attendance, and achievement

- Evidence of the supportive relationships identified above was shared in regards to how the SFN approaches the school to assist in the conduct of water, plant, and wetland studies specific to the remediation of contaminated water resulting from mining activity. Field-based salmon enhancement projects also connect Grade 6/7/8 students with conservation activities in the classroom
- The EVB School Council expressed that the key strengths of EVBS are the staff, who they described as dedicated, hard-working, and caring professionals. The Council appreciates their efforts and is highly supportive of their work and efforts on behalf of their students
- Elders now appear to be more connected as a valuable resource at EVBS. The Team heard that rabbit snaring and the sharing of creation stories (and their relation to the curriculum) are valued activities. Orange Shirt Day was observed at EVBS, at which Elders sharing their stories of Residential School with students. Parents also appear more willing to visit the school and to contact the school when they have questions or concerns about programming or events
- Attendance at parent-student-teacher interviews has increased every year for the past three years. The Team heard that over 81% attendance by parents was achieved at the most recent interview session. Parents who do not attend are re-booked for another meeting time. This is a positive trend and a large increase from three years ago
- Community agencies such as the RCMP and health service providers are supportive of student achievement and provide rewards and recognition for students who succeed at school
- In order to promote greater attendance at Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, invitation letters are sent to parents. The letters are then followed up with contact made by the CELC and the school secretary. After meetings have taken place, a thank-you note is sent by the Learning Assistance Teacher to parents to express appreciation for their attendance
- Pelly Crossing holds a welcome supper each fall for new and returning community members. Staff members are also invited into homes to build relationships and to learn more about local culture and history. Staff expressed to the Team that these efforts by the community to make them feel welcomed are greatly appreciated

- The Team heard from multiple sources that there are a number of structured school-based cultural events each year. This said, the Team also heard that the frequency of on-the-land and culture based activities has decreased over time despite there being a strong desire for them (particularly on the part of students)

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue to reinforce the emphasis placed on fostering connections with parents, School Council, community agencies, and the Selkirk First Nation that see the school take a prominent role as a place of learning in the community
- Explore and identify activities and/or events that would continue to foster stronger parental involvement and engagement in both school-based and on-the-land activities
- Given the interest and desire for on-the-land cultural activities, continue to seek ways to co-construct community cultural activities to specific curriculum outcomes and credits. A broad-based planning session between the school, SFN representatives and FNPP may be a helpful approach to create alignment between culture and curriculum
- In contrast to the previous review, the Team heard that there are now stronger, more supportive relationships in place between the EVBS, School Council, and SFN. In order to ensure longer-term sustainability of initiatives, the Team feels that a formalized written curricular plan between EVBS and SFN could help further build sustainability beyond the current relationship-based nature of growth and development

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:

- A higher level of planning at the start of the school year (utilizing a PD Day) has helped to create a smoother start to the school year than in previous years. The Team heard that the improved organization and structure at EVBS is generally appreciated by staff
- A number of organized events that students appreciate take place at EVBS. These include the breakfast program each morning, the Drama/Art option rotation, and choice to pursue other options (e.g. Music). Girls Night Out was also shared as an offering focused to specifically meet the needs of students. Students shared with the Team that they appreciate these programs but felt that there could be more art materials

- The Team heard from staff and students that the creation of a dedicated PE teacher has been a positive addition to school programming. Rather than only playing games, students now receive (and greatly appreciate) athletic training and skill development (including Dene Games) on a full-year basis in a school-wide full-year PE program. As a result, Pelly Crossing and Carmacks students are now playing organized sports together
- Related to the above, students appreciate the “soft-start” with PE being offered as the first class in the morning for older students. Students indicated that this approach helps motivate them to come to school on time and to “kick-start” their day
- With respect to arriving to school ready and on time, the daily school schedule has been adjusted to begin later (9am) and end later (3:35pm) to assist students to arrive in the mornings and to support student attendance and achievement. Lunch has also been aligned with the community lunch schedule to reduce students returning late for the afternoon
- When asked what might help to further improve their school, a fitness room, more library books suited to older students, and Home Economics were some of the ideas that students shared with Team members
- Blended Learning (BL) is a teaching strategy that has received focus over the past 2 years in the Yukon. While not a specific program offered at EVBS, the Team heard that BL is being deployed as one of numerous academic tools at the high school level. Some students shared that they appreciate the Moodle platform though it is a lot of work to ensure that they do not fall behind
- With respect to Blended Learning, some Review Team members felt that BL could be more directly applied to Math instruction
- As indicated, specialist high school teachers not only teach their subject area but are also assigned to teach primary classes as a means of ensuring that staff and students all know each other. Similarly, the Team wondered whether a comparable strategy could be applied in order that teachers could attend the full-year Native Language classes with their students. Such an approach could help to further foster Northern Tutchone language rejuvenation and transfer into other aspects of the curriculum
- Classroom teachers present “here’s what’s happening in my classroom” at School Council meetings over the course of the year. The Team heard from School Council that this helps give them a greater understanding of student learning, assessment, and the activities that take place throughout the year

- The Team learned that there is no tutoring program at EVBS, though students shared with the Team that teachers will stay after school to help them with their work. Yukon College is open until 5pm as a place where students can access Moodle online lessons and assignments
- Related to the above, students shared with the Team that there are few activities in the community for them to engage in after school, and that there is a desire on the part of some students to be engaged meaningfully after school
- The addition of the SSU (Student Support Unit) room in the former Industrial Education lab has created a comfortable, quiet, relaxing, and welcoming space that older students really appreciate having access to. This space helps them to focus on their work during the school day. Some students expressed interest in having the room available to them more often
- Related to the above point, there currently is not an identified Industrial Education or similar space for students to engage with applied projects and develop hands-on workplace trades skills
- The option for elementary students to go to the sensory room and engage in a set of activities that help them to self-regulate and return to class is reported as being beneficial to students
- The Team heard from some staff that, at times, there is not sufficient timely communication with regards to events taking place that affect their schedule. For example, some teachers commented that surprise or last-minute events may catch them unawares and affect their assignment, preparation time, or overall plan for the day
- Specific to communication, some staff felt that there could be better communication and follow-up when an incident has occurred (for example on the playground). At times, some staff feel “out of the loop” with respect to how an issue may have been resolved
- Staff shared with the Team that fundraising activities are a central piece of their volunteer work, and that they would appreciate a transparent accounting of how fundraising money is used and how it is expended
- Teachers identified that there are many old resources left behind by previous staff members that have accumulated in the school over the years. Many of these resources are outdated and no longer used

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Review communication practices in order to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, staff are aware of activities and events in a timely manner. Work to reduce the potential for events that may inadvertently impact preparation and instructional time
- As a staff, review communication protocols with respect to ensuring that all staff are aware of how communicating and reporting back on incidents involving students will occur and what reasonable timelines for reporting may be
- Consider a staff-wide review of the current material resources at EVBS, with a focus on clearing out old materials no longer in use
- At a future staff meeting, share with the staff a spreadsheet indicating the amounts raised and expenditures of fundraising dollars accumulated in order to ensure accountability and recognition for the efforts of staff
- As a staff, explore meaningful ways to integrate Northern Tutchone language across a variety of curricular areas in an activity-based environment in order to deepen students oral language skills through students' ongoing application and connection to the language

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:

- There appears now to be a focus on clear expectations for learning and academic achievement at EVBS that was not as prevalent when the last review took place in 2012. For example, Reading Recovery, morning literacy, and balanced literacy approaches are being deployed to support early literacy

- In order to promote academic achievement, prepare for high school, and give students earlier access to graduation credits, the Grade 9 students take classes with Grade 10 students
- The Team heard from multiple sources that there are monthly School Wide Writes conducted across grades, and that evidence is used to inform conversations regarding instruction and school growth. While effective at the elementary level, Team members did hear that they may be less so at the high school level as a formative assessment strategy
- Student achievement data is displayed clearly in the School Growth Plan, and information on attendance and student achievement is shared openly with School Council the SFN. Staff shared with the Team that they are further trying to share (non-identifying) achievement data at community events
- The School Growth Planning team shared data showing positive improvements in attendance across most grade-levels, and information on attendance is shared with SFN, parents, and community
- The Team was impressed with what it learned about the level of organization and communication with respect to Learning Assistance and the referral process at EVBS. In particular, a strong emphasis is placed on communication with parents in order to ensure they are involved in referrals, assessments, and reporting
- Data walk-throughs are held monthly at EVBS as a means to provide an ongoing focus on assessment at a school-wide level. The Team did hear from some staff that there was ambiguity regarding what the expectations of them were on these data walk-throughs. As a result, some staff reported feeling disheartened and confused when they did not meet expectations of which they were not clear
- There appears to be ambiguity on the part of many school community members regarding the pathways to graduation and what is required for students to graduate with a BC diploma from EVBS. Clearer communication of the graduation program to students, teachers, family, and community would help further reinforce the academic focus now in place at EVBS

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue and refine the use of the committee model currently in place to assist with timely group communication, distributing leadership/building leadership capacity, and school-wide planning
- Continue the focus on monthly assessment of writing, ensuring that meaningful forms of assessment are used across grade levels. As a staff, give thought towards the future inclusion of relevant reading and numeracy assessment while being mindful not to create a concurrent sense of “assessment burnout”.
- With respect to assessment initiatives, work with curriculum consultants at Learning Support Services to ensure that assessment practices can be supported in ways that reflect the latest assessment practices
- Continue the use of relevant student data and evidence to inform conversations regarding student learning needs and academic achievement, both in the school and with community partners
- Make sure that all staff are clearly aware of the purpose and their role in data walk-throughs in order to ensure that the practice is a positive and enriching professional learning experience. Consider ways to further build staff capacity through mentoring and coaching within the staff, through visitations to other schools, and/or the YTA Mentorship program
- With respect to graduation requirements, continue to use multiple communication channels to share this information with teachers, community, and parents. Continue to work with counsellors from other schools and develop graduation planning and personal post-graduation tracking
- Consider reporting credits earned to parents and students during regular reporting periods, and using documents available in the student information system (such as diploma verifications) could also help to communicate progress to each student and their family

In conclusion

The Review Team was strongly encouraged by the growth at EVBS that is clearly evident since the previous 2012 review. The relaxed, open learning atmosphere, friendly and polite students, keen, energetic staff, positive community relationships, and willingness to reflect on current practices all contribute to the creation of a vibrant school environment. The Review Team is hopeful that, with a sustained focus on effective communication, working as a team with the community, and a continued emphasis on Northern Tutchone language and culture, the momentum currently in place will continue. It is further hoped that this momentum will be channelled in ways that will ensure it is sustained (and sustainable) for the long-term benefit of all students who attend EVBS now and in the future.

Innovative practices to share:

- The SSU (Student Support Unit) Room is a positive and welcoming learning space for older students
- Offering a full-time PE program is a programming strength
- Monthly school-wide writes are conducted across grades
- Teachers present to School Council regarding their classroom programs on a regular basis
- High School teachers also work at the primary level in order to better share their expertise and create supportive relationships with all students

Considerations for Yukon Education

- The Review team did hear that there is a safety concern with respect to ATVs and snowmobiles being driven across the playground
- Explore the suitability for a soccer field to be created on the playground. Students shared that they would like to have a soccer field installed for them to play on