

LAKEHEAD DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
Urban Aboriginal Education Project Final Report
February to June 2010

Presented to UAEP Provincial Steering Committee

Cultural Programming

Through community partnerships, students of Lakehead Public Schools continue to participate in cultural learning activities such as Pow Wow's, Fall Harvest and in-school cultural learning stations. This opportunity has allowed for a sharing of cultures, building of positive relationships with schools, community and families and Aboriginal students to feel connected to their self-identity, pride and schools.

Aboriginal Role Models

The initiative of the role model program was to have Aboriginal artists, cultural and traditional teachers, and elders visit schools and classrooms. One key element that supports this initiative was the partnership between LDSB and *Learning through the Arts* in creating an arts program in elementary schools where Aboriginal artists deliver a series of lessons.

Aboriginal Mentorship

The Aboriginal Mentorship program is offered at four secondary schools and integrated with the Native Studies credit courses. The goals for this program are to improve student achievement, empower Aboriginal youth as they gain interpersonal, leadership and communication skills, increase public confidence and nurture positive community relationships. Students in the mentoring program have the opportunity to volunteer as mentors or protégés to Aboriginal students at an elementary school. In addition, the community has provided learning opportunities through workshops and student/community engagement through participation in various activities and events (i.e. regional Aboriginal youth gathering).

Aboriginal Transitions

The Aboriginal Transitions program is offered in four secondary schools and assigned with a Special Assignment Teacher (SAT). The Aboriginal Transitions program provides in-school student supports, cultural and community connections for First Nations' students who leave their First Nation communities to complete their secondary education in Thunder Bay. On December 21, 2009, Lakehead District School Board received approval for a new locally developed credit entitled Grade 10 Aboriginal Transitions Course. This course is focused on First Nations cultural as well as the Literacy foundation skills that will enable success in other areas of the curriculum.

Elder Supports

An Elders advisory committee was established and includes 3 Elders and 1 Senator. Elders have been instrumental for input and feedback in Aboriginal Education, delivering cultural learning sessions in our classrooms, providing teacher professional development and conducting open and closing remarks at special events and forums.

Welcoming Environments

LDSB developed a Welcoming Environment Draft that focuses on four areas that support Aboriginal student and parental engagement: (i) Environment; (ii) Practices and Attitudes; (iii) Outreach; and (iv) Resources and Instructional Practices. Five schools have been selected and each has received funding and support to implement more Aboriginal presence in the schools.

Aboriginal Content, Resources and Materials

Along with the numerous books and resources that were purchased and/or developed the most recent activity is the Aboriginal Education webpage. A compilation and direct access to locally developed documentation and links to Aboriginal education teaching resources has been developed. <http://www.lakeheadschoools.ca/aboriginal/>

Aboriginal Curriculum Modules

Community partnerships were established to compile traditional and historical information and input while creating the six-day grade 10 civics module that was led by Civics Teacher Andrew Foulds. The module focuses on six topics: Residential Schools, Treaties, Challenges, Aboriginal Diversity, Aboriginal Rights and Self-Government, and Terms to Know. Teachers and secondary Chairs received professional development, access to an expert panel, and opportunity to share feedback.

Professional Development

In the 2009-10 year, there were mandatory training sessions for the grade 5 and 7 elementary teachers, and at the secondary the focus was the grade 9 and 10 English teachers (essential). The focus for elementary teachers was to embed Aboriginal content and perspective into their cross-curricular instructional planning using the resources in the First Peoples Resource Collection. The secondary teacher's professional development sessions were focused on instructional literacy strategies while embedding Aboriginal content. Both divisions received information on best practices with engaging the Aboriginal learner. The First Peoples Resource Collection lessons that were developed and tried in classrooms, have been compiled, reviewed, and will be posted on the Aboriginal Education webpage and shared with all Lakehead teachers.

Also in the 2009-10 year, there were additional voluntary sessions that were requested by and open to a variety of Lakehead teachers and staff: French Immersion teachers and also received Aboriginal resources written in French; local elementary teachers' union and occasional teachers' union.

Community

The community connection is integrated into Board and school practice. Connections to community are vital in providing Aboriginal students with opportunities learn, to participate in cultural and traditional events and to engage with Aboriginal role models. The program and support systems that have been established with the Board, elementary/secondary schools and community continues to flourish and evolve. This is an ongoing initiative.

Aboriginal Parent/Guardian Advocacy Program

All school staff can access a volunteer advocate to assist with open houses, student registrations, translation services and nurturing relations with parents/students. As described in this project, an advocate can be a support person, helper, friend and/or interpreter. Currently there are nine volunteers available to assist schools, parents, guardians and community. An orientation manual and ongoing training has been provided to volunteers that would assist them in their roles. For 2009/10 school year, a volunteer has been accessed four times. The Seven Grandfather Teachings are central to the guiding principles of the advocacy role.

Local Research – Lakehead University

The initial phase of the research was focused on a survey that included input from local stakeholders. This was carried out by Dr. Christina Van Barneveld, who delivered her findings in June, 2009, as the Preliminary Scan Report.

The final phase of the research was conducted through focus groups with invested stakeholders. This report is expected from Dr. Lisa Korteweg in June, 2010.