



# Our Shared Experience

A Review of Thames Valley District School Board's First Nations Métis and Inuit Programming

January 2014

Prepared by Research and Assessment Services

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*After viewing Aboriginal artwork and learning more about FNMI cultures and communities, this artwork was created by Julee Coulcci, teacher, artist and graphic designer. This piece of art was inspired by a Canadian Aboriginal artist, Norval Morrisseau Kinship, Family, 2005. Kinship was intended to capture, humanity, creativity and possibilities when multiple communities join together. Held at the centre, is a piece of art created by TVDSB First Nations Métis, and Inuit students (2010), this piece is symbolic to the commitment of students which lies at the heart of educational endeavors.*



# Acknowledgments



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We are pleased to distribute *Our Shared Experience: A Review of Thames Valley District School Board's First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Programming*. One of the major accomplishments of the review process is the gathering and sharing of diverse experiences, aspirations, and ideas from students, parents, community members, and staff. As we reflect on where we have been, what we have accomplished, and where we need to improve, we begin the process of embarking on a new phase of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI<sup>1</sup>) programming.

We wish to thank the many people that have generously shared their experiences, thoughts, and talents throughout the review process and over the past five years of programming.

-  To the students, parents, community members, and staff whose stories and insights form the basis of understanding our past, present, and future. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the 80 stakeholders who participated in interviews and focus groups between May and December 2013, specifically for the purposes of this review. As well, we acknowledge and honour the voices of many others who shared their experiences and perspectives prior to the start of the review process in the form of videos, artwork, reflection sheets, reports, and other documentation.
-  To the members of the FNMI Programming Team and the FNMI Programming Review Advisory Committee that provided input into the development and implementation of the review, as well as the final report. The diverse knowledge and skills of members of these teams have been invaluable in the review process and the creation of this report.
-  To the team in Research and Assessment Services, for their role in the conceptualization of the review, the collection and analysis of evidence, and the writing and editing of the report.

We encourage you to explore *Our Shared Experience* and use the insights and recommendations to assist in making a difference for FNMI students.

thank you!



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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this review, the term FNMI is the primary term used to refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples as a collective group. This term has been selected because it will be familiar to readers as the term used by the Ministry of Education, and by the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB). It is also used to reflect the diversity within the Indigenous population, honouring the three main distinct Indigenous groups within Canada. However, the terms "Indigenous peoples" and "Aboriginal peoples" will also sometimes be used interchangeably. It is important to note that the authors have chosen to use these terms in recognition that there is diversity within and among these groups that is implicit but difficult to convey using any one term.



## Director's Note

This comprehensive review of First Nations Metis and Inuit (FNMI) programming within Thames Valley District School Board is both timely and relevant. The addition of new program staff to the FNMI portfolio provides an opportunity for us to look back, as well as to look forward.

I offer my sincere thanks to staff within the former Program Services department, (some of whom are working in their same roles within Learning Support Services), as well as school staff for their incredible leadership to the FNMI portfolio. Our FNMI community partners, parents and students, who have played an integral role to creating a solid foundation for successful outcomes for our FNMI students. While more work is to be done, we need to celebrate the achievements we have made in support of student learning, and community building. Many of these programs have been highlighted within the review.

I am very proud of what we, as a TVDSB community, have accomplished to date, and yet, we know that our FNMI students are still achieving far below provincial and board standards. Our literacy and numeracy results, and graduation rates are exceedingly low for our FNMI students. It is our moral imperative to determine how to improve outcomes for our students. They need our help, and they need it now.

This review is meant to be a springboard for dialogue and decision-making. Five broad recommendations, and associated 'considerations' from each of the sections (Collaborative Relationships, System Structures, Programs, Lifelong Learning, and Programming Outcomes) have been posed. Key insights from the review, as noted on page 6, highlight three key areas: collaborative relationships, collective responsibility, and coherent programming. Our collective responsibility and strategic actions will ensure successful outcomes for our FNMI students as they navigate their future.

Our FNMI students deserve the very best programs and opportunities. It is an exciting time, and I look forward to the road ahead!

**Miigwech/ Anushiik/ Yaw^kó (Thank you)**

Laura Elliott, Director of Education



# Note from Authors



## Authors' Note

Research and Assessment Services has a long-standing commitment to the FNMI portfolio. Prior to the Review of FNMI Programming, members of the Research and Assessment team have participated extensively in the examination of FNMI data, in its many forms, for multiple projects and initiatives. Importantly, they have also served as members of the FNMI Student Achievement Committee and FNMI Student Attendance Working Group. In these roles, they observed, listened, and participated in dialogue with community members, parents, students, and staff. Prior to the present more formal process of this review, they have engaged in an organic, internalized cycle of reflection that was rooted in relationship development, personal learning, and identification of ongoing opportunities and struggles. As with any text that is crafted, there are certain dimensions of their experiences and reflections that influence the selection, interpretation, and synthesis of information in the review process and subsequently this product.

Reviewing a portfolio as it has unfolded over time and in complexity requires strong leadership and willing hands. Research and Assessment worked collaboratively with many key people involved with the FNMI portfolio. During this journey, the Manager of Research and Assessment Services provided constant guidance and numerous colleagues have offered their assistance to review data, write sections, read drafts, locate images, convert files, and do all of the small tasks required to bring this document into its completed form. Together, the Research and Assessment Services team have had the opportunity to learn more about local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and the diverse experiences, needs, and expectations that exist within TVDSB.

This review is a story of the FNMI portfolio with a close eye to what the data tells us. Although the review was crafted by Research and Assessment Services, reverberations of the story have been drawn from multiple voices. It is an attempt to read, synthesize, and understand information from a wide range of sources representing a variety of perspectives. Through the process of writing, we have regularly reflected on the type of information selected and questioned what was or might be omitted and why. However, this report ultimately presents observations and interpretations filtered through our experiences and beliefs. Similarly, as a reader, the meaning you derive is influenced by your own unique experiences and worldview.

Research and Assessment Services, Thames Valley District School Board



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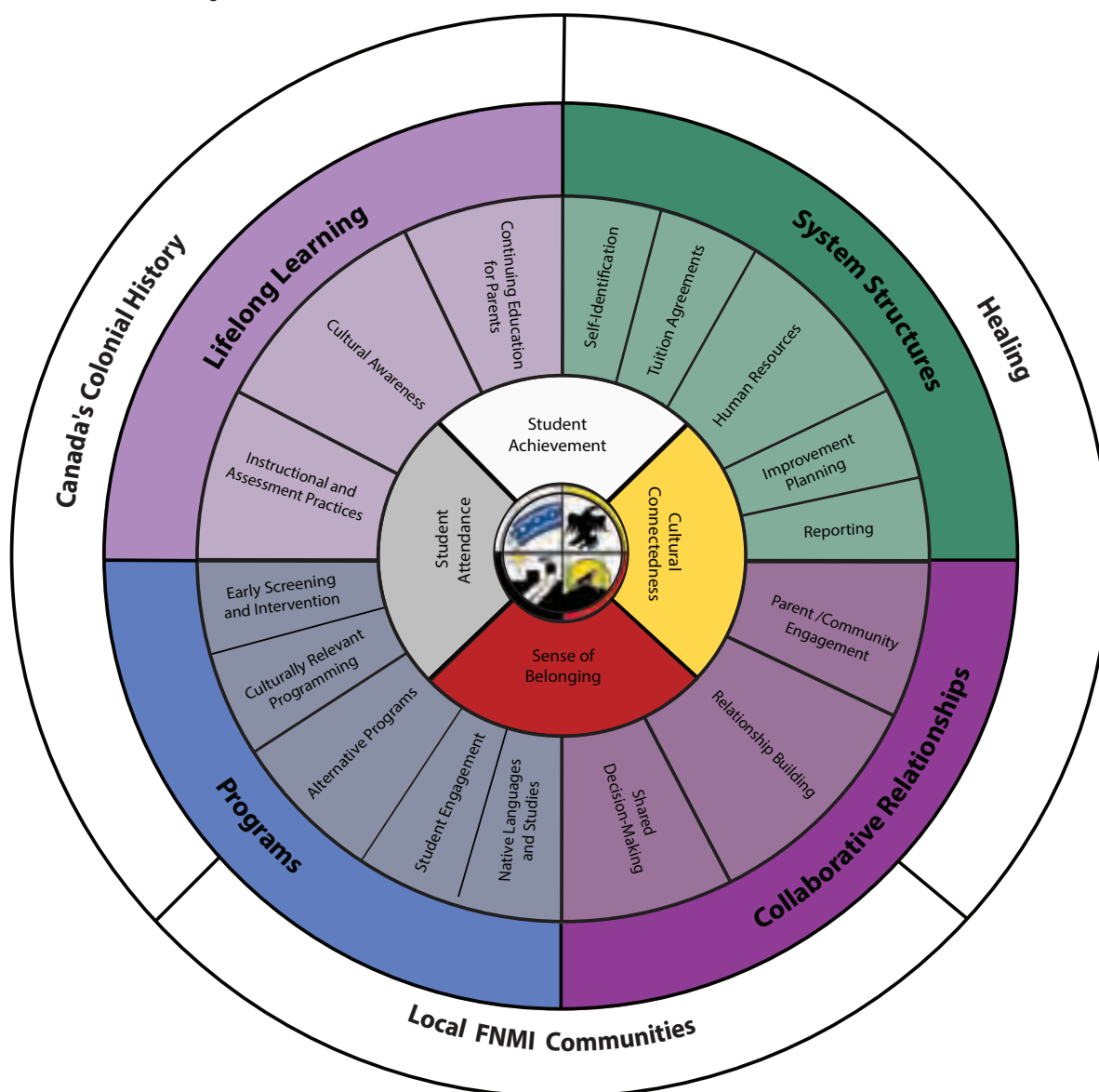
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# Review Framework



## Inspiration for the TVDSB Review Framework



The source of inspiration for the review framework is TVDSB's Learning Wheel, which uses the Anishnabe Medicine Wheel teachings to promote wholistic approaches and respects the four dimensions of self (spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental). The circular framework symbolizes interconnectivity of the components. The image illustrates how relationships within and across the dimensions relate to implementation and outcomes. At the centre of the circle is the FNMI logo developed by the FNMI Student Advisory Council in 2009-2010. The placement of students in the centre denotes the pivotal role of student voice, as well as improved outcomes for FNMI students as the primary focus for this review and ongoing programming.

The outermost layer, encompassing the strategies for effecting change that are adjacent to the innermost layer of desired student outcomes, represents contextual information. Diversity of local FNMI populations is highlighted alongside policies and practices contributing to systemic barriers and responses and approaches demonstrating resilience and hope for the future.

# Introduction



## Background

Acting on the Ontario government's vision of supporting "prosperous and healthy Aboriginal communities" outlined in *Ontario's New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs* (2005), the Aboriginal Education Office of the Ministry of Education (2007) identified key strategies to:

- ☼ Improve educational outcomes for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students (FNMI); and
- ☼ Increase competency of all students regarding FNMI histories, cultures, and perspectives.

*The Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007), herein referred to as the *Policy Framework*, provides educators at all levels (i.e., Provincial, Board, and school) with wholistic and integrated approaches for effecting change, as well as clarifying roles and relationships. Provincial progress on the implementation of the policy framework has been assessed and reported on in fall 2009 and summer 2013.

Locally, the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) began pre-implementation work in 2007-2008 with supplemental funding support from the Council of Directors of Education. Over the course of that school year, TVDSB partnered with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Centre for Prevention Science and contracted an external project coordinator to engage in a needs assessment. Existing programming and structures were reviewed and priority areas identified for moving forward.

Implementation of the *Policy Framework* followed this period of reflection in the 2008-2009 school year and was expedited in 2009 with the hiring of an internal FNMI Education Advisor<sup>1</sup>. Beginning in 2009, TVDSB undertook a collaborative process with local FNMI communities to envision a wholistic experience for FNMI students. The result of this collaboration is the comprehensive document, *Our Shared Vision* (TVDSB, 2010c). This resource establishes the value of long standing partnerships, a commitment to shared responsibility, and a desire to nurture success in FNMI students.

Following five years of implementing the *Policy Framework* and three months prior to the second Provincial progress report, TVDSB Trustees approved the following motion during the regular Board meeting held on 2013 May 14:

That the Board undertakes a program review of FNMI programs and supports, including but not limited to First Nations languages and courses, to identify ways to improve FNMI student outcomes for both elementary and secondary students.



Figure 1.  
Resource documents

<sup>1</sup> Since its inception at TVDSB, the role has been filled by three employees with a period of vacancy from November 2012 until May 2013.



# Introduction



## Purpose of Review

Based on the motion approved by TVDSB Trustees and input from other key stakeholders, three main purposes for the review, as related to programming for FNMI students and about FNMI histories, cultures, and perspectives, were established:

- ☼ Inquiring and documenting progress to date in programming and key outcomes;
- ☼ Developing an understanding of needs, desires, and expectations; and
- ☼ Establishing a framework for a coordinated and systematic approach to programming.

## Scope of Review

From the outset of the review key stakeholders within and beyond the TVDSB community have been consulted about the nature of the review. Given the breadth of programming and proposed timelines for completion (i.e., winter 2014), the following parameters were established:

- ☼ Programming implemented between the 2008-2009 and 2012-2013 school years<sup>1</sup>;
- ☼ Explicitly focused on FNMI students and/or about FNMI histories, cultures, and perspectives<sup>2</sup>;
- ☼ Programming developed, coordinated, and/or implemented at the system/Board level<sup>3</sup>.

## TVDSB Review Framework

This review framework integrates principles, responsibilities, and approaches outlined in the Ministry's *Policy Framework* and TVDSB's *Our Shared Vision*. The graphic demonstrates how these areas are integrated and provided a guide for the review process, as well as a resource for future planning and review. The 29 Board responsibilities delineated in the *Policy Framework* were reviewed and collapsed into four main categories: collaborative relationships, system structures, programs, and lifelong learning. *Our Shared Vision* and key program and initiative documentation was reviewed and analyzed to identify key desired student outcomes. Cultural connectedness, sense of belonging, student attendance, and student achievement were identified.

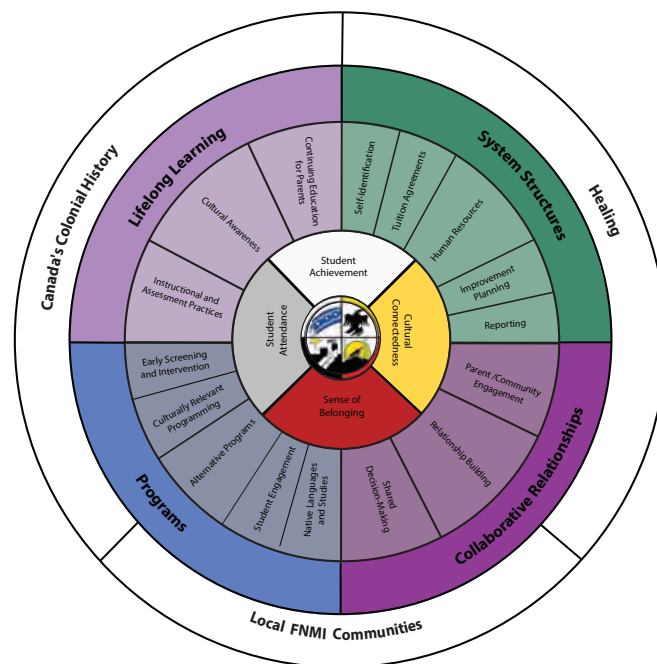


Figure 2.  
TVDSB Review  
Framework

<sup>1</sup> The final section of this report, *Moving Forward: the 2013-2014 School Year*, provides a synopsis of programming as of December 2013 and plans for the remainder of the school year.

<sup>2</sup> There is extensive programming available to all students and/or staff that is not specific to FNMI students FNMI (e.g., differentiated instruction and assessment, professional learning and supports, special education supports) and therefore not explicitly detailed in this report.

<sup>3</sup> Programming is being implemented at the Provincial and school level to meet identified needs of those communities. School specific information is provided in cases where substantial Board level support and/or involvement occurred.

# Introduction



## Methodology

In light of the scope of the review, in terms of timeframe, breadth of programming, and focus on both process and outcomes, and in keeping with the guiding principles outlined in *Our Shared Vision*, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data and analysis techniques were employed. As much as possible, participant and stakeholder experiences are honoured through the use of direct quotes, links to videos and reports, and artwork. An overview of information sources and analysis techniques are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Review methodology - description of analyses with corresponding data sources**

### **Document Analysis** **Over 100 documents were analyzed**

**Purpose:** to collect, summarize, and analyze historical artifacts to gain understanding of facts, motivation, intent, and purpose of processes and/or programming.

#### **Information Sources**

- \* PowerPoint presentations
- \* Meeting agendas and minutes
- \* Reports (e.g., Annual Community Reports, Aboriginal Education Office reports, CAMH Annual Reports)
- \* Promotional materials (e.g., brochures, flyers, posters)
- \* Resource Documents (e.g., Transition Guide, Visiting Elders and Cultural Teachers Guidelines)
- \* Videos (e.g., student productions, Board meetings, media clips)
- \* Participant Feedback (e.g., reflection sheets, exit cards, email correspondence)

### **Descriptive Statistics and Simple Linear Regression**

**Purpose:** to summarize and compare information pertaining to implementation and quantifiable outcomes.

#### **Information Sources**

- \* Self-identification data
- \* Student achievement (i.e., Phonological Awareness, EQAO, Credit Accumulation)
- \* Student attendance
- \* Course offerings/enrolment (i.e., Native Languages, Native Studies)
- \* Participation rates (e.g., professional learning, programs/initiatives)

### **Thematic Analyses of Interview and Focus Groups**

**Purpose:** to identify, examine, and record patterns across stakeholder experiences and perceptions.

#### **Information Sources**

- \* Elementary and secondary school students
- \* FNMI parents and community members
- \* TVDSB staff (e.g., teachers, school and system Administrators, support staff)
- \* Representatives from organizations (e.g., partners, educational institutions, community-based agencies)

**Framework Analysis:** focuses on the intersection between findings derived from analyses of key artifacts, student data, and stakeholder experiences and perspectives. This method was used for identifying and categorizing overarching themes to develop high level recommendations and additional considerations.





# Introduction



## Navigating through this Report

This report contains five sections in which the first three are based on the framework developed for this review. Where you see bolded text there is a hyperlink to an electronic document. The table below provides a quick overview of each section.

**Table 2: Overview of Review Contents**

| Section                                 | Focus of Content                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Context</b>                          | Highlights principles, policies, and key events relevant to Aboriginal education in Ontario along with an overview of local FNMI communities.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Policy Implementation</b>            | Is covered in four subsections titled: collaborative relationships, system structures, programs, and lifelong learning. These are based on an analysis of Board responsibilities outlined in the <i>Policy Framework</i> . Each subsection contains text boxes that identify the Board responsibility as outlined in the <i>Policy Framework</i> . |
| <b>Programming Outcomes for Student</b> | Divided into four subsections titled: cultural connectedness, sense of belonging, student attendance, and student achievement. These are based on the documented outcomes related to programs and initiatives implemented over the past five school years.                                                                                         |
| <b>Discussion</b>                       | Provides high level recommendations with additional considerations based on evidence and stakeholder input gathered for the purposes of this review.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Moving Forward</b>                   | Offers a synopsis of programming implemented during 2013-2014 (i.e., up until December 2013), as well as plans for the remainder of the school year.                                                                                                                                                                                               |

# Key Insights

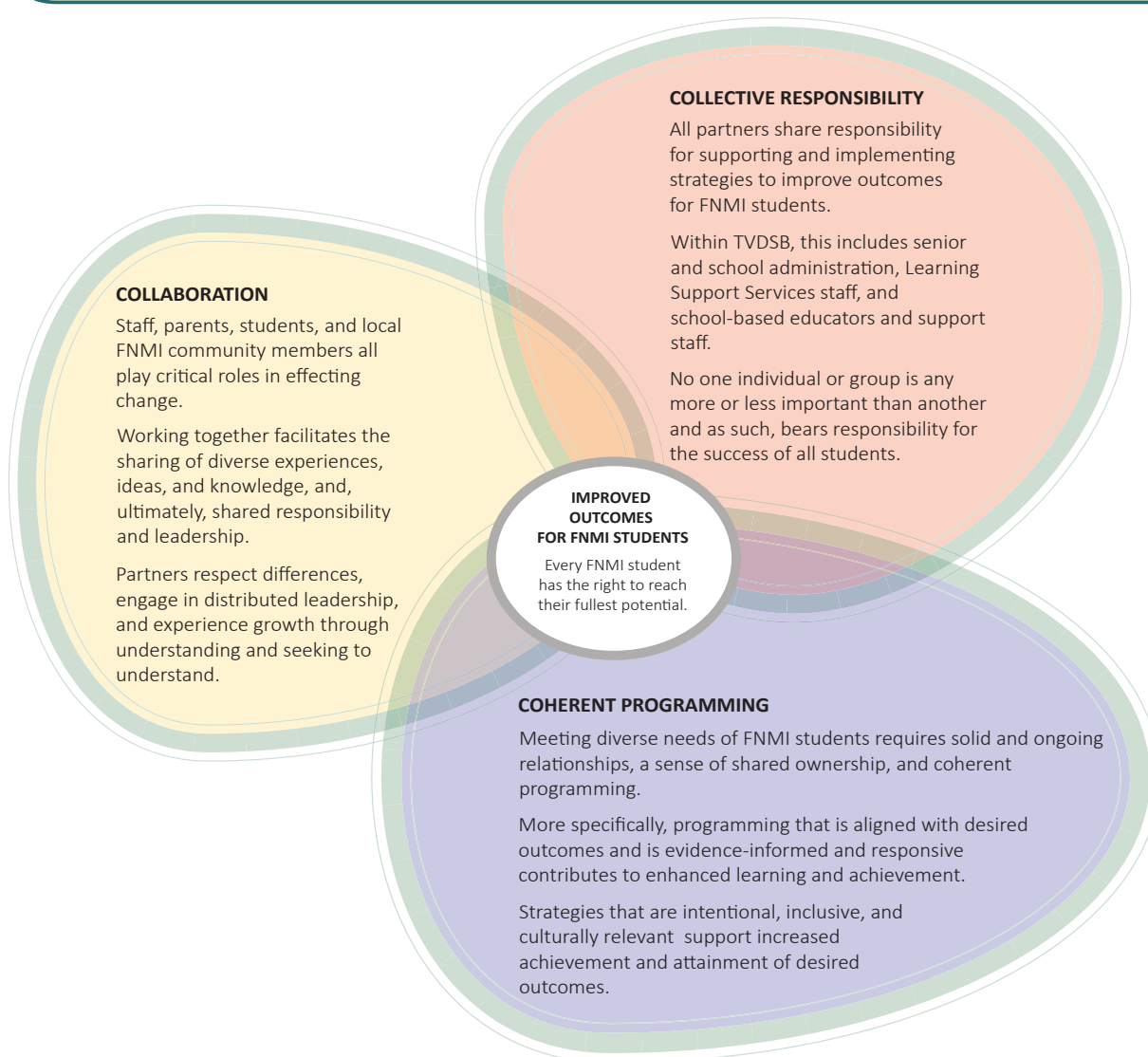


## Our Shared Vision

*Local FNMI communities and TVDSB partners will work together to provide wholistic<sup>1</sup> educational experiences for FNMI students through which their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs are met. The ways in which we teach and support all students through curriculum and programs across all subject areas will honour the rich histories, languages, and cultures of FNMI people. An inclusive approach to education will affirm cultural identities, pride, and encourage students to reach their highest potential.*

TVDSB, 2010c

*Based on the experience and input shared in interviews and focus groups for this review, along with the analysis of programming and outcomes over the past five years, three interrelated and overarching themes have been identified. The research indicates that collaborative approaches, a sense of collective responsibility, and coherent programming are necessary for supporting improved outcomes for FNMI students.*



<sup>1</sup> Wholism is an Indigenous concept that comprises the spiritual, emotional, physical, and intellectual domains of human development. In addition, it addresses the relationships among the self, family, community, wider world, and the environment (Archibald, J. 2008).



## Canada's Colonial History

Canada's historical narrative begins with its "discovery", and celebrates its early settlement by the English and French pioneers. From the settler perspective, Canada is a great nation, built upon the hard work of these early pioneers. However, from the perspective of many FNMI peoples, Canada's settlement has been devastating. Prior to contact, Turtle Island (as it is referred to by many Indigenous peoples) was a land base shared by many diverse Nations, each with their own rich cultures, histories, and civilizations among which sophisticated trade systems existed.

When the Europeans first arrived, Indigenous peoples welcomed them and helped them to survive. They developed 'peace and friendship' treaties that outlined their relationships with settlers, which were fundamentally based on three principles: equality that honours difference, self-determination, and peace, friendship and harmonious co-existence. The links under the two Row Wampum provide more information about the treaties. Once European settlers became less dependent upon FNMI peoples for survival, the power dynamic shifted. European settlers disregarded the principles of these original treaties and began to impose their conflicting values upon Indigenous peoples. "The imposition of a colonial framework on Canadian – Aboriginal relations has had powerful, negative effects on Aboriginal peoples over nearly four hundred years of contact" (McKenzie & Morrisette, 2003, p. 254).

The first *Indian Act* (enacted in 1876) promoted an explicit vision of assimilation, in which Indigenous peoples were encouraged to shed their 'Indian Status' and traditional cultures in order to be considered full members of the broader Canadian society. The Act removed Status from Indigenous peoples who married non-Status people. It also banned potlaches<sup>1</sup> and other cultural ceremonies, as well as large gatherings of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples were unable to defend their rights in the court of law during this time period because the act also prohibited their use of lawyers.

<sup>1</sup> Potlaches were ceremonies that included feasting, dancing, and giving gifts to all in attendance.

Although the *Indian Act* has undergone numerous amendments since it was first passed in 1876, today it largely retains its original form. The implications of the federal *Indian Act* were far reaching; it governs most aspects of many Indigenous peoples' lives (i.e., status, bands, reserves). A detailed explanation of the *Indian Act* and other pivotal points in our colonial history is available from: <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/?id=1053>

In 1884 school attendance became compulsory by law for Aboriginal peoples under 16 years of age.



Figure 3.  
The Two Row Wampum

Figure 4.  
Link to All Canadians  
are Treaty People video

Some Indigenous peoples had access to day schools. Where residential schools were the only option, children were often forcibly removed from their families, or their families were threatened with fines or prison if they failed to send their children. One local survivor said of her experience leaving for residential schools, "we were all crying because we didn't know where they were taking us, we didn't speak English..." (Murch, 2010). The video made by the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation described how the system forbade children from acknowledging their Indigenous heritages and cultures or speaking their own languages. It chronicles the loss children felt being separated from their families and how children were severely punished if the strict rules were broken.

The residential school experience is described as traumatic for children and the schools have had an ongoing impact through intergenerational effects. Intergenerational impacts of residential schools describe the disconnection and alienation that resulted from removing children, loss of cultural teachings, disrupting teaching of parenting skills, and community identities. The disruption of family likely led to a "downward spiral of addiction, violence, and poverty" (Smith et al., 2005, p. 48).



Figure 5.  
Mount. Elgin Residential  
School



Figure 6.  
Mount. Elgin Healing  
Monument



Healing is necessary and challenging; it involves reconnection, nurturing, positive individual and community cultural identity, and resiliency (Hunter, et al., 2006). There are many dimensions to healing and rebuilding FNMI cultures, “traditionally, our people’s teachings addressed the total being, the whole community, in the context of a viable living culture” (Kirkness, 1999, p. 15). Contemporary cultures benefit by understanding history. One resource that guides understanding is the *Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. This commission was established to uncover the truth about the schools. As of 2013 the Commission’s hearings are ongoing. Closer to Thames Valley, a local support is found in the Indigenous Education Coalition (IEC <http://www.ieceducation.com/>). This group provides education support to First Nations and urban Aboriginal communities in South western Ontario. IEC recognizes FNMI people’s inherent right to determination; including self-control of education by developing programs, curriculum, and teaching resources that provide support for education systems, including schools. Resources also exist within local First Nations communities and the city of London, one example of these is the Healing Lodge on the Munsee-Delaware Nation (<http://www.swrhl.ca/index.html>). Education can play a role in the healing process. Katz and McCluskey (2003) suggest that “a major challenge in Aboriginal education is to help Aboriginal students retain their cultural identity, while at the same time preparing them for life in a complex, non-Aboriginal and homogenizing world” (p. 13).

## An Introduction to FNMI Students in TVDSB

The FNMI population in the TVDSB is diverse; it is important that the Board is aware of and responsive to this cultural diversity. As of October 2013, there were 1539 (895 Elementary and 644 Secondary) self-identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students enrolled in the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB). The FNMI self-identified population has grown; from 1357 last year to 1539 this year. More than three quarters of these students are urban, and the remainder live in the communities of Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Munsee-Delaware (Lenni Lenape) Nation, or Oneida Nation of the Thames. Each of the three communities has tuition agreements<sup>1</sup> with the TVDSB.

*“There are differences between Nations..., as well as differences within Nations.... The Aboriginal peoples of this land, called Turtle Island, have more similarities than differences.”*

(Partridge, 2010, p.11)

## Urban FNMI Population

The urban FNMI population represents the largest population of FNMI students enrolled in Thames Valley schools. There is great diversity within the FNMI population and appreciation for the number of distinct cultures which prohibit general description. Urban FNMI students are supported through two centres, each of which provides services to support and strengthen communities:

1) N’Amerind Friendship Centre is a non-profit organization designed to meet Aboriginal needs and interests through an Aboriginal voice and presence at urban community events, meetings, education forums, community networking and outreach activities. The Centre is also home to Wiingashk School, an alternative education program for secondary school students (<http://www.namerind.on.ca/>).

2) The Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) provides wholistic health services by sharing and promoting traditional and western health practices to live in a state of well-being (<http://www.soahac.on.ca/>). Both sites serve people from on and off reserve, who are status, non-status, and Métis.



Figure 7  
SOAHAC facility



Figure 8  
N’Amerind Friendship  
Centre logo

<sup>1</sup> There are two tuition agreements currently in place: one between Munsee-Delaware Nation and TVDSB; and one between Chippewas of the Thames First Nations, Oneida Nation of the Thames and TVDSB.

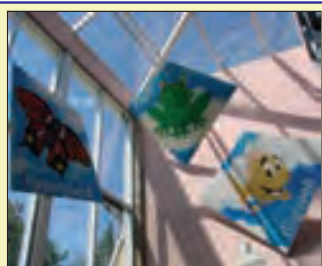


Figure 9.  
Antler River Elementary School

**Chippewas of the Thames First Nation.** “In the mid-17th century, the Southeastern Ojibway occupied an area along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay, west along the north shore of Lake Huron, and north along the east shore of Lake Superior. By the late 17th century, the Chippewas and other branches of the Southeastern Ojibway began to expand into what is now identified as Southern Ontario, an area then occupied by the..[Haudenosaunee]...Sometime after the turn of the century, the Southeastern Ojibway settled in the areas around the Bay of Quinte, Lake St. Clair, in the valleys of the Grand River and the Thames River, and along the north shore of Lake Ontario.

The Chippewas reserve was established for the Chippewas in 1819 – one of the many reserves following the Huron Tract Cessions of 1818. Between 1834 and 1885, several parcels of the reserve land were ceded, sold and leased. The Band formally changes its name from Caradoc No. 42 to Chippewas of the Thames on September 9, 1986” (excerpt taken from Ontario Aboriginal Business Directory 2004-2005 published by Indiana Marketing, Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business).

Chippewas of the Thames First Nation is the site of Antler River Elementary School; it is a modern facility that educates 120-140 students between JK and Grade 8 each year. The architectural design is aesthetically and environmentally significant; it is intentionally designed to promote balance and harmony. The school follows the Ontario Curriculum infused within an environment that purposefully and visibly validates Ojibwe culture. Indigenous ways of knowing are integrated with curricular learning as a way of engaging students and enhancing opportunities for success (Wilkinson, 2012.). <http://antlerriverelementary.edublogs.org/> has information about the school and school governance.

**Munsee-Delaware Nation.** The Munsee-Delaware Nation Lenni Lenape (or Delawares) Algonquian peoples were historically “agricultural, hunting, fishing and gathering people, living in settlements along the tributary streams that flowed into the Delaware River and the Hudson River on their southward journey through the present States of Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York and New Jersey” (<http://www.munseedelawarenation.org/>).

“After the 1500s, more and more newcomers arrived and wanted to settle in the Munsee - Delaware homeland. [The Munsee-Delaware] people would eventually be forced out. What followed was 200 years of wandering, from place to place, amid war, strife and starvation, before our people would secure our current location in present-day Ontario.” (Ibid) Today, the Munsee-Delaware Nation is committed to developing a sustainable and self-sufficient economy.

The community governs education through the re-establishment of the Nation’s Education Committee; approximately 40 elementary and secondary school students from the Munsee - Delaware Nation attend several schools in the London region. Communities provide bus transportation to designated schools within TVDSB.

**Oneida Nation of the Thames.** “The Oneida people are one of the Six Nations, part of the...Haudenosaunee... Confederacy which include Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Seneca, and later the Tuscarora. The Oneida are also known as ‘people of the standing stone’ and are organized in three clans; turtle, bear, and wolf. Clan membership is passed through the mother. Women have always had a strong voice in choosing the leadership by nominating and choosing their nine Chiefs, three from each clan” (excerpt taken from Oneida Nation of the Thames, Reserve Your Place Now... Presenting Business Opportunity for Today’s Industry handout). “People of the Oneida Nation relocated from New York State in 1840 where some 240 members migrated to their present location. Pooling their own resources they purchased lands on the banks of the Thames River approximately 30 kilometres west of London Ontario” (excerpt taken from Oneida Employment and Training handout).

Standing Stone School provides wholistic educational opportunities for 190 students from JK to Grade 6. Walking the hallways reveals a rich history of the Oneida people and cultural teachings as a central part of the educational experience. After Grade 6, students enrol in TVDSB schools through a tuition agreement.



# Collaborative Relationships



Strengthening existing relationships and building new partnerships is a cornerstone of *Our Shared Vision* and the *Policy Framework*. This section illustrates consultative and collaborative approaches and practices implemented to facilitate shared decision-making, build and strengthen relationships, and engage FNMI parents and communities.

## Shared Decision-Making

*Boards will strive to...*

*...establish Aboriginal Education Advisory Committees that include representation from First Nations community members and local Aboriginal service delivery organizations such as Friendship Centres*

*...engage in shared planning with First Nation, Métis and Inuit families and communities with respect to student transitions, curriculum, resource materials and student supports*

*...develop strategies to involve Aboriginal communities and service providers in ensuring that integrated and seamless services are provided to Aboriginal students with special needs*  
*...create strategic partnerships with First Nations to help students make a smoother transition from schools in First Nation communities to provincially funded elementary and secondary schools*

This image, which is the cover of the Ministry's *Policy Framework*, denotes a section of policy being referenced in this review.



In November 2009, FNMI community members, representatives from Aboriginal organizations, and TVDSB staff gathered together for the inaugural FNMI Student Achievement Committee (SAC) meeting. This group continued to meet on a regular basis through to November 2012 when the FNMI Education Advisor position became vacant. Over the course of this review, discussions have been underway to reconvene a similar consultative and collaborative group.

During their time together, the larger committee engaged in team building and professional learning, reviewed the Ministry's *Policy Framework*, and provided input into the development of the FNMI Student Success Action Plan. Sub-committees and ad hoc working groups, comprised of community and school board partners, also joined together to inform and develop programs, curriculum and resources.

Former committee members interviewed for this review expressed diverse perceptions related to the value of the group. Some felt the committee provided an ongoing mechanism for relationship building, consultation, and learning from one another. Others felt that the membership was too large, attendance was inconsistent, and the work needed to be focused more on actions than process (Interviews, 2013).

Throughout the past five years, numerous programs and resources have been collaboratively developed utilizing consultative practices. An example shared in numerous interviews conducted for this review was the *Elders' Gathering* held at N'Amerind Friendship Centre in January 2010. The gathering was co-hosted by TVDSB, Oneida Nation of the Thames, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Munsee-Delaware First Nation, and N'Amerind Friendship Centre and involved many Elders, community members and administrators. A sharing and/or talking circle approach, an Indigenous learning and teaching tool that honours and empowers the under-privileged voice, was employed to gather insight and input into the development of a *Visiting Elders' and Cultural Teachers (VECT)* program (TVDSB, Oneida Nation of the Thames, Chippewas of the Thames, Munsee-Delaware First Nation, and N'Amerind Friendship Centre, 2010).

### FNMI SAC Mandate

1. Provide input and direction into a FNMI Student Success Action Plan
2. Review implementation of plan
3. Advocate for FNMI students, parents, and community needs
4. Identify issues and barriers impacting FNMI students
5. Research, brainstorm, and offer solutions
6. Contribute to the development of programs and services

*Brunette-Debassige, n.d.a*

Consulting with community is the key to all decision - making processes. The FNMI SAC and FNMI PIC [Parent Involvement Committee] provided ongoing mechanisms and networks to engage with community in a real and systematic way.

*Interviewee, 2013*

Figure 10. Mandate of FNMI SAC.



# Collaborative Relationships



With regard to ensuring integrated and seamless services are provided to FNMI students with special needs, several strategies have been implemented including: joint meetings with staff from Standing Stone Elementary; transition planning and activities; expedited access to technology upon transferring to provincially funded schools; and greater awareness of community resources (e.g., Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre, N'Amerind Friendship Centre) among TVDSB staff (Interview, 2013).

## Relationship Building

*Boards will strive to...*

*...build strong positive connections with local First Nations and other Aboriginal organizations such as Friendship Centres  
...facilitate intercultural dialogue throughout school communities*



In September 2009, TVDSB hired its first FNMI Education Advisor. Paramount to this role is relationship building and “cultural brokerage” – fostering a connection between “two worlds” (Interview, 2013). The importance of nurturing positive and meaningful relationships is embodied in Our Shared Vision – the collaboratively developed vision, mission, and guiding principles for working together in supporting FNMI students to reach their full potential.

Data from interviews with FNMI community members and TVDSB staff suggest positive steps have been taken towards improving communication and working relationships. A number of community members and staff commented that relationships between TVDSB and FNMI communities have been strained over the past year due, in part, to the eight month vacancy in the FNMI Education Advisor role. The vacancy resulted in the temporary cessation of several strategies focused on collaboration and engagement (e.g., FNMI Student Achievement Committee, FNMI Parent Involvement Committee). In one interview, it was suggested that the length of the vacancy conveyed an unintentional message that FNMI programming is “not that important” (2013). However, it is important to note that the Board engaged in four interview panels in their search for a candidate with the skills and experiences outlined in the job posting.

**Nothing is more important to our [FNMI] communities than relationships.**  
*Interviewee, 2013*



Figure 12. Guiding principles: *Our Shared Vision*.

In addition, some community members have expressed disappointment in the Board’s decision to hire an Education Advisor who is non-FNMI. They believe FNMI people are in the best position to advocate and program for their children. At the same time, a number of key informants pointed to the important role allies play in advocating for the rights of FNMI students and communities. As noted above, the Board exercised considerable effort in attempting to fulfill this position with the person they believed was best suited for this important role.

Click on the pictures to learn more about the people and/or the processes involved.

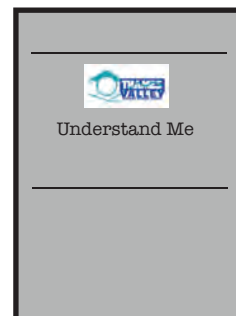


Figure 11. Collaboratively developed resources.

# Collaborative Relationships



At the system level, there have been a number of presentations and workshops promoting intercultural dialogue. One example is TVDSB's Equity and Inclusive Education Committee's **Learning Conference**. This one-day workshop focused on meeting the accommodation needs of students, including **FNMI students**.

Formal and informal opportunities for intercultural dialogue at the school level vary by location and perceived need. For example, in preparation for the arrival of First Nations students (i.e., under tuition agreements) at Delaware Central, staff and students had the opportunity to learn more about FNMI history, culture, and perspectives (e.g., attending Chippewas of the Thames Children's Pow-wow in June 2010, **presentation to staff by the FNMI Education Advisor**).

These types of opportunities contribute to relationship building and understanding at the school level. As many of these initiatives rely on school leaders, some questions have been raised on how to best address gaps (e.g., contextual and relational) that sometimes result following turnover in Administration.

We had a school wide trip to a children's pow-wow in June of 2010. It was a fantastic experience and a great experience for the children to get to know one another.

Elementary Teacher, 2013

## Parent and Community Engagement

*Boards will strive to...*

*...increase involvement of Aboriginal parents, Elders and other community resources*

*...develop creative strategies to encourage more Aboriginal parents to participate more actively and directly in the education of their children*

Over the past five years, TVDSB has partnered with local First Nations communities, N'Amerind Friendship Centre, and community organizations (e.g., CAMH) to engage, support, and collaborate with FNMI parents and communities. Examples include collaboratively developed programs and resources, community outreach events (e.g., information sessions about programs, student-led parent-teacher conferences within the community), as well as educational and cultural events (e.g., **Eli Baxter, Theo Fleury, Indigenous Arts Festival**).

In 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, TVDSB initiated the development of a system-level FNMI parent and guardian advisory committee. The purpose of the committee was to guide and advise on FNMI education issues, as well as identify and reduce barriers to FNMI parent engagement.

Over the two years in which FNMI Parent Involvement Committee was active, the group engaged in a variety of activities including:

- ☀ establishing Terms of Reference and promotional material;
- ☀ organizing engagement initiatives (e.g., David Bouchard Book Tour, Susan Aglukark); and
- ☀ generating ideas for future actions (see **meeting minutes**).

Following the vacancy of the FNMI Education Advisor position, the committee discontinued. Data collected for this review suggests a strong interest among some to reconvene the group with a renewed focus on supporting parent and community engagement at the school level. This group might also explore opportunities to initiate system level supports (e.g., develop and implement a certificate program on parent engagement, working with communities and families to develop and implement programming by and for Indigenous people) (Interview, 2013).



Figure 13. Poster for Indigenous Arts Festival (2011).



Figure 14. Information brochure about FNMI PIC.

# System Structures



## Self-Identification



*Boards will strive to consult on, develop and implement strategies for voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification in partnership with local Aboriginal parents and communities*

System structures represent policies, procedures, and processes that support infrastructure and implementation of programming. These include self-identification, tuition agreements, human resources, action planning, and reporting.

During the 2006-2007 school year, TVDSB consulted with community members and various employee groups to develop the *Aboriginal Student Self-Identification Policy* and in 2007-2008 to inform a communications campaign.

The initial campaign, beginning in 2008, included a combination of presentations, advertising, and print materials. The purpose of the campaign was to raise awareness of parents, students, community members, and staff about the purpose, process, and underlying principles (i.e., voluntary and confidential) of the self-identification policy. Students and families can identify or remove identification at any time. The primary method for self-identification is via the student registration form or completion of the Student Information Sheet<sup>1</sup>.

Since 2008, the percent of TVDSB students who are self-identified increased by 41%

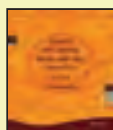


Figure 15.  
Check it Out (2008), I Am... (2012)

Feedback on materials, such as the posters (pictured left), coupled with changes in Ministry of Education directives regarding self-identification

prompted TVDSB to reflect and revisit existing items and messaging. Figure 15 displays original information materials produced in 2008 alongside materials drafted in 2012. The vision of the revised materials is to share success stories and raise awareness about the importance of how people choose to identify (e.g., an Oneida person could call themselves Oneida or Haudenosaunee). Special grant funding received during the 2011-2012 school year enabled TVDSB to begin the process of revising materials (i.e., templates for “I Am” posters reflecting community diversity), as well as purchasing and distributing items (e.g., *Wave a Red Flag video*, *Our Shared Vision* t-shirts). In a recent meeting of community members, students, and staff, it was suggested that this work be revisited and enhanced by incorporating more student voice. In 2014, the FNMI Education Advisor will be consulting with the FNMI Student Advisory Council on how to best disseminate this information.

## Tuition Agreements



*Boards will strive to...*

*...review First Nation tuition agreements in collaboration with local First Nations to ensure they are designed with strategies to improve student achievement in mind*

*...maintain continuous dialogue with First Nations regarding tuition agreements thus ensuring transparency and accountability*

The most recent negotiation process with two of the three communities resulted in an agreement with greater focus on student outcomes following more than four years of discussion. The process is complex and political, “there is tension and frustration on both sides...an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality” (Interview, 2013). Several people interviewed for this project suggested enhanced communication and addressing power imbalances as two possible strategies for improving the process moving forward.

Tuition agreements outline the services and programs to be provided by the board and paid for by the First Nations. Tuition agreements also clarify the roles and responsibilities of each party and protect all parties involved.

TVDSB, 2010c

<sup>1</sup> Student Information Sheet is pre-populated with information contained in TVDSB's Student Information Management System. Sheets are sent home annually for review and revision as necessary.

# System Structures



There are structures in place that provide opportunities for continuous dialogue regarding tuition agreements; specifically, monthly **First Nations Advisory Committee (FNAC)** meetings and two semi-annual reviews.

FNAC is a Standing Committee of the Board with a mandate of reviewing, considering, and recommending to the Board “on matters impacting First Nation pupils of the Board covered under this tuition agreement and matters arising out of the Tuition Agreement with the First Nations” (TVDSB, 2011b, FNAC Terms of Reference). The Committee is comprised of trustees and FN community representatives as voting members, and Board and school representatives as non-voting members.

Aspects of the agreement between local First Nations communities and TVDSB have been highlighted in guidelines released by the Ministry of Education.

*Interview, 2013*

Data collected during this review suggests FNAC is presently operating as more of an informational group, but has the potential and mandate to become the venue for “rolling up our sleeves”, and engaging in deeper conversation (Interview, 2013).

## Human Resources

*Boards will strive to...*

*...enhance resident expertise in the board by hiring Aboriginal staff at all levels*

*...hire qualified Aboriginal Education Counsellors and promote their effectiveness in providing appropriate services to Aboriginal students*



Effective June 2013, TVDSB formally committed to “recruiting, hiring and promoting qualified employees to support the Boards’ mission and vision, while respecting the core principles of dignity, integration and equity for all applicants and staff”

**(Policy No. 3013).** TVDSB has endorsed the draft Charter of Commitment on FNMI Education released by the Ontario Provincial School Board Association (OPSBA) in November 2013. Within this draft, Boards are encouraged to promote voluntary confidential self-identification of FNMI staff.

Historically, two First Nations Counsellor (FNC) positions were paid for by First Nations communities through tuition agreements. As such, service delivery was tied to schools outlined in the agreements. TVDSB hired two additional FNCs to support FNMI students. In 2010-2011, the FNC service delivery model was revised. Under the tuition agreements and in accordance with partnership regulations set out by the Ministry of Education, First Nations communities decided to directly hire First Nations Student Advocates instead of providing funding for the Board to hire FNCs. First Nations Student Advocates provide wholistic community-based services to First Nations students attending elementary and secondary schools covered under the tuition agreements. In light of these changes and in recognition of the needs of urban Aboriginal students, the delivery model for FNCs expanded to increase accessibility of services across TVDSB. In addition, professional learning opportunities are available to build capacity of all counselling and social work staff to meet the needs of FNMI students (e.g., half day training on the topic of residential schools in 2010-2011).

Over the past 2 years, FNCs have directly supported over 325 students in 29 schools





# System Structures



## Improvement Planning



*Boards will strive to...*

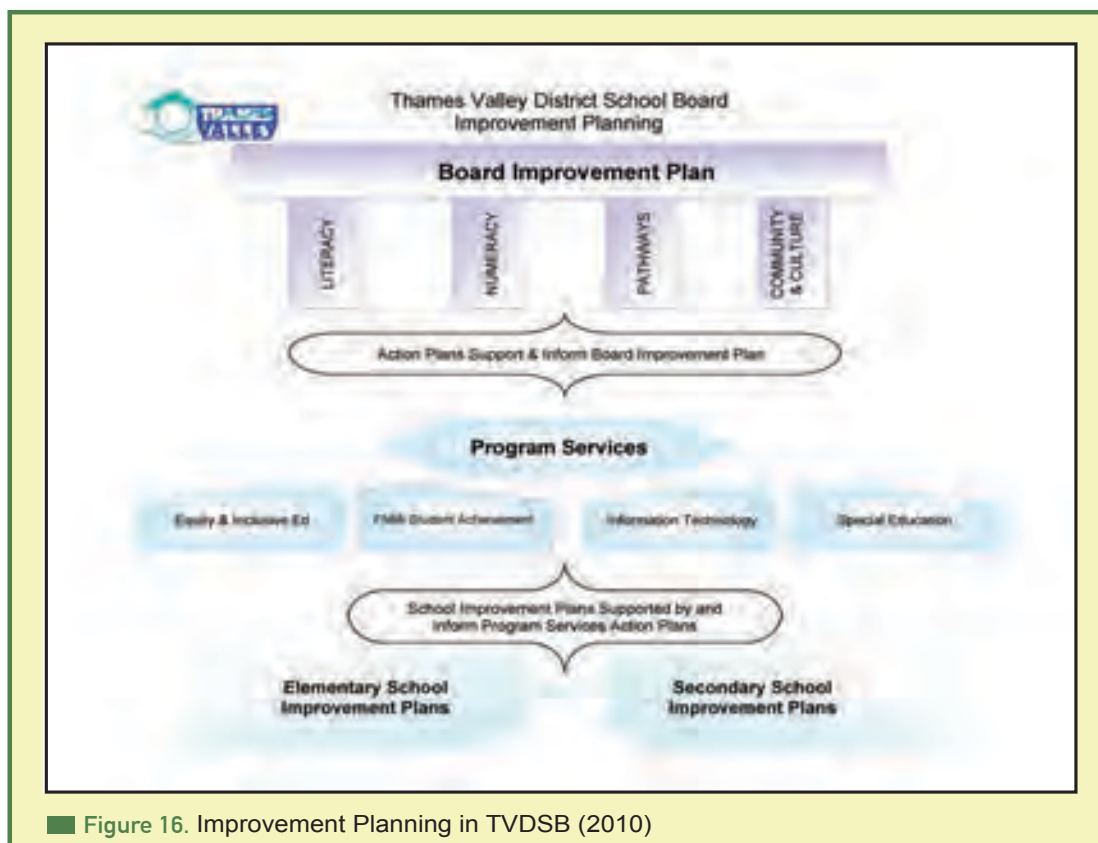
*... develop yearly actions plans focused on improving the literacy and numeracy skills of Aboriginal students, including students with special education needs*

*... in collaboration with Aboriginal communities, organizations, parents and students, integrate the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework into school board planning in order to improve Aboriginal student achievement*

In 2009 - 2010, the FNMI Student Achievement Committee (SAC) began collaboratively developing TVDSB's annual FNMI Action Plan. Membership during the first two years consisted of over 30 individuals including: FNMI students, FNMI community members, representatives from Aboriginal organizations and agencies, and TVDSB employees (e.g., trustees, administrators, support staff).

During the initial year of consultation (2009-2010), the FNMI SAC reviewed the Ministry's *Policy Framework*, identified alignment of programming with the responsibilities outlined in the document, and provided feedback to form the basis of the Draft FNMI Student Success Action Plan. Group members also explored the relationship and alignment of the plan with the Board Improvement Plan.

The focus of the group during the second year of consultation shifted to discussing program development and implementation. Reflection on the nature of many actions outlined in the plan led to a recommendation from the group that the plan be converted from an annual to a 3-5 year plan. In the fall of 2011, the draft plan, which is the most current, was updated to include progress during the 2010-2011 school year and ideas for the future.

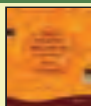




# System Structures



## Reporting



*Boards will strive to develop a process for reporting to Aboriginal parents and communities on Aboriginal student achievement*

Annual Community Reports were developed and posted on the TVDSB website for three consecutive years. No report was produced in 2012-2013. This is due in part to the absence of an FNMI Education Advisor for most of that school year. The three reports that were produced and posted on the TVDSB website, provide a summary of programming, professional development, community engagement, and collaboration from the previous school year, as well as a description of plans for the upcoming year.

The first report, *First Nations Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education*, also provides a more detailed description of context including: local relationships and history, policies and guiding principles, and partnerships.

Additionally, Annual Indicator Reports (2009-2010 to 2012-2013) shared with community representatives via FNAC and/or FNMI SAC, provide summarized achievement and attendance data for self-identified students.

During the initial collaborative action planning process in 2009-2010, FNMI SAC members suggested the following with regards to sharing information with parents and communities:

“TVDSB should report more often – every reporting period for secondary students, and they should include credit accumulation.

*When reporting to the community, consider different avenues of dissemination such as feasting as a way to bring people together for a presentation. Offer childcare, and traditional opening/closing to acknowledge those who have gone.*

*Involve First Nation Counselors/Directors/Principals in delivering presentations to community members (attendance, dollar amount involved, cost to community).”*



2009 - 2010



2010 - 2011



2011 - 2012

Figure 17. Links to Annual Community Reports

# Programs



Thames Valley District School Board offers a variety of programs to directly support FNMI students as well as increase cultural competency of all students and staff. Programs focus on Native Languages and Native Studies, student engagement, alternative programming, and early screening and intervention. As well, many programs support pride and cultural competency.

## Native Languages

"Native Languages are in a state of crisis. Within the language lies the heart of our cultures. When you teach language you are teaching culture. When the board invests resources into Native Languages they are truly listening to the community and responding to needs of reclaiming and preserving Aboriginal cultures (Interview, 2013).

### Native Languages and Native Studies

*Boards will strive to...*

*...increase access to Native Language and Native Studies programming for all students*

"Native language opportunities need to be equal to that of French and Spanish" (recommendation from FNMI Student Advisory Council, Crooks et al., n.d., p. 19).

Native Languages courses are offered in elementary (Grades 4 to 8 in lieu of taking core French) and secondary schools based on the projected number of students enrolled (in accordance with Ministry of Education funding regulations and through the annual budget process). New Native Languages course offerings can be requested by schools and are considered based on projected enrolment.

Parents/guardians of elementary students (Grades 4 to 8) "may request to register their child(ren) at a school where a Native Language is offered" if no such program is offered at their child(ren)'s designated school (TVDSB, 2012c, p.3).

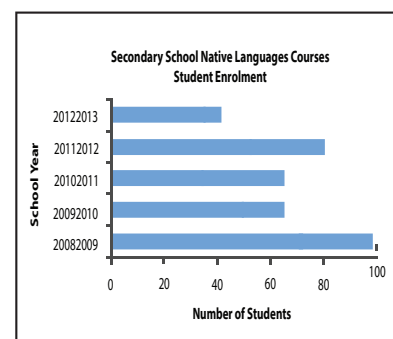


Table 3. Secondary enrolment in Native Languages.

The number of local fluent Oneida and Ojibwe speakers is on the rise; however, finding certified teachers who are fluent speakers has been challenging at times (Interview, 2013). Provisions within the *Education Act* (Regulation 184) and referenced in TVDSB *Independent Procedure 9041* (2012c) enable Boards to hire candidates without Ontario teaching certifications to teach Native Languages. Additionally, the current Tuition Agreements state that "...where the qualifications of candidates are judged to be relatively equal and in accordance with Ministry Regulations, the First Nations Language Certification granted by the First Nations will be used as a preferred qualification to teach the Native Language program."

Over the past five years, Oneida language programs have been offered at five elementary and two to three secondary schools<sup>1</sup>. Ojibwe language programs were offered at one or two secondary schools during the same time period<sup>2</sup>. Enrolment numbers in secondary school Native Languages courses for the past five years<sup>3</sup> are displayed above. Beginning in 2012-2013, the Board provided funding for the Native Languages (Oneida day school) teacher at Delaware and Lambeth.

## Native Studies

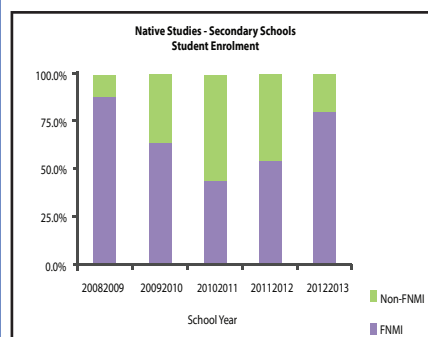


Table 4. Secondary enrolment in Native Studies.

Similar to Native Languages courses, Native Studies are offered when course registrations meet or exceed the minimum number of students (based on Ministry of Education guidelines). The number of schools offering Native Studies courses has grown from a low of three in 2008-2009 to a high of seven in 2011-2012. Continued growth is anticipated as additional schools are exploring offering Native Studies Courses.

Saunders Secondary School was the first school in Ontario to offer Native Studies.  
Interview, 2013

<sup>1</sup> In 2008-2009, three secondary schools offered Oneida language courses. Over the last four years, two secondary schools have offered the program.

<sup>2</sup> Ojibwe languages courses were offered at two schools in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 and one school in 2010-2011 to 2012-2013.

<sup>3</sup> Student enrolment numbers were combined for Oneida and Ojibwe languages courses to protect the privacy of students, as enrolment in some years is very small (e.g., n = 1).

# Programs



Native Studies courses aim to provide all students with increased “awareness and understanding of the history, cultures, world views, and contributions of Aboriginal peoples in Canada” (Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 3). Both students who self-identify as FNMI<sup>4</sup> and non-FNMI<sup>4</sup> enroll in Natives Studies courses offered within TVDSB secondary schools.

During a recent focus group with FNMI students in Grades 9 – 12, participants expressed a desire for more opportunities to take Native studies courses and “wish more non-FNMI students would take the courses”, as they believe this would “help build multiculturalism in schools” (2013).

## Student Engagement

*Boards will strive to...*

*...develop creative strategies to engage more Aboriginal students in school activities and encourage them to participate more actively in school*



The large majority of creative engagement strategies are developed and implemented at the school level in collaboration with students, staff, and community members. System level initiatives include TVDSB’s partnership with CAMH to facilitate leadership, relationship building, and transition programming as a means of supporting increased student engagement.

## Student Leadership

Approximately 12-20 FNMI student leaders<sup>5</sup> from across TVDSB are selected annually<sup>6</sup> from a pool of applicants for participation in the FNMI Student Advisory Council. Each year, the group develops a vision for their time together and works to translate their ideas into action. Examples of the Advisory Council’s work include:



Figure 18. FNMI student developed logo.



Figure 19. FNMI student story quilt presented to TVDSB.

- ☀ Designing and painting a logo to represent TVDSB’s diverse FNMI student population;
- ☀ Producing the short film *Through Our Eyes* to illustrate FNMI student experiences(2010-2011);
- ☀ Creating an abstract story quilt and sharing the inspiration of their individual quilts with Board Trustees at the October 23, 2012 **Regular Board Meeting**, and
- ☀ Organizing information campaigns at six secondary schools to raise awareness among staff and students about FNMI culture, history, and current events (2012-2013).

## Student Relationships and Transitions

The Board together with CAMH facilitates opportunities for FNMI students to:

- ☀ Develop healthy relationships with other FNMI youth;
- ☀ Discuss their school experiences;
- ☀ Access support at key transition points; and
- ☀ Develop or enhance their sense of connectedness to school and their culture.

Elementary programming is offered for Grades 7 & 8 FNMI students and is led by TVDSB staff and FNMI community mentors. Specifically, in partnership with CAMH, four TVDSB elementary schools offer mentoring for grades 7 and 8 FNMI students. FNMI Youth Liaison Workers connect with elementary FNMI students to support them through culturally-based activities that draw on their strengths in school, and prepare them for the transition to secondary school.

At the secondary level, three schools offer the FNMI Peer Mentoring Program for which senior FNMI students selected for participation<sup>7</sup> attend a one-day training session before being paired with one or more Grade 9 students. The pairs or groups meet regularly and, with guidance from FNMI community leaders with CAMH, engage in a variety of activities. Student participation in the mentoring programs over the past five years ranges from 20 to 60 within the elementary panel<sup>8</sup> and 60 to 90 in the secondary panel<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Based on self-identification extracted on the October 31st Ministry of Education count date; some students may have enrolled in TVDSB and/or self-identified after this date.

<sup>5</sup> Students in grades 10, 11, 12 or 12+ are encouraged to apply.

<sup>6</sup> The FNMI Student Advisory Council started in 2009-2010.

<sup>7</sup> Students are nominated or apply for selection within the program.

<sup>8</sup> Since 2008-2009 the number of elementary schools offering the program has doubled from two to four.

<sup>9</sup> Since its inception, the secondary school program has been offered at Beal, Saunders, and Thames.

# Programs



**Figure 20.**  
Student views about  
the Peer Leadership pilot  
(2013).

In addition to the programs described above, TVDSB partners with CAMH and communities to organize Transition Conferences in the fall and spring. FNMI students in Grade 8 are invited to attend these one day sessions, with the opportunity for follow up sessions, to:

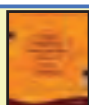
- ☀ learn more about high school (e.g., programs, resources, supports, co-curricular activities);
- ☀ meet other Grade 8 students, secondary students and staff; and
- ☀ share in activities which promote positive cultural identity.

Since 2008-2009, the number of schools represented at the conferences has increased from five to as many as 23 in 2011-2012<sup>10</sup>, including Antler River Elementary School located within Chippewas of the Thames First Nation community. Approximately 65 elementary students attend each conference and attendance at both sessions is encouraged.

Additionally, the TVDSB works with local Colleges and Universities to promote smooth transitions for FNMI students through outreach and transition initiatives. FNMI students receive presentations from representatives of Fanshawe College in their schools and also have the opportunity to attend the College to shadow students and learn more about their programs and services, including the FNMI lounge and club.

In 2012-2013, TVDSB piloted a program to enhance and extend existing peer relationship and transition programs. The Peer Leadership pilot paired eight Grade 9 FNMI students from Beal with six Grade 8 students from Aberdeen and Lorne Avenue<sup>11</sup>. The primary purpose of the program was threefold: to support leadership development of Grade 9 students, augment transition supports for Grade 8 students, and enhance student engagement. The program consisted of training for Grade 9 leaders, as well as opportunities to plan activities for the Grade 8 students. Activities included a visit to Beal, as well as debriefing sessions following the activities. Participants also had the opportunity to visit **Nmaachihna Indigenous Enviro-Education Centre**.

## Alternative Programming



*Boards will strive to...*

*...provide Aboriginal students with access to programs that focus on Aboriginal cultures and traditions and are delivered by Aboriginal staff, such as the Alternative Secondary School Program within Native Friendship Centres*

*...develop lighthouse programs focused on Aboriginal students under the ministry's Student Success and literacy & numeracy initiatives*

## TVDSB's Alternative Education Program

Programs available to students through Alternative Education provide an opportunity for students to address their academic, social, and emotional needs in a non-traditional environment. For some students, Alternative Education can be considered a differentiated program option.

<sup>10</sup> Numbers were smaller in 2012-2013 as a result of political action taken by teachers in response to the passing of Bill 115  
<sup>11</sup> Aberdeen and Lorne Avenue are Beal feeder schools



# Programs



"In the 1990's Native Alternative Schools were created in partnership with the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres as a way to address high dropout rates among FNMI youth. Native Alternative Education offers culturally-appropriate supports, curriculum, and traditional healing services. TVDSB offers 2 FNMI alternative sites provided in partnership with the local First Nation communities [(i.e., Anishnaabe Skiniw Alternative Centre)] and the N'Amerind Friendship Centre [(i.e., Wiingashk School)]" (TVDSB,n.d). Click **here** and on the icons to the right for more information.



Figure 21. Anishnaabe Skiniw Alternative Class (2012-2013).

## Early Screening and Intervention



*Board will strive to...*

*...ensure that Aboriginal students benefit from school-based early screening and intervention programs*

*...ensure that Aboriginal students are included in early screening and intervention programs aimed at the identification and remediation of learning difficulties*

*...develop strategies and procedures to ensure smooth placement, and any necessary subsequent adjustments for First Nation students with special ed. needs as they move between schools in First Nation communities and provincial school boards*



The early and ongoing identification process<sup>12</sup> begins in Junior Kindergarten, or when the child first registers within TVDSB, and continues through the primary years up until Grade 3. Information about each child's social, emotional, physical, language, and mathematical skill development is gathered from parents/guardians, teachers, and support staff (see **Assessment** summary to learn more). Together with principals and learning support teachers, teachers use this information to discuss whether further information and intervention is necessary (see **flowchart** for more information about the Early and Ongoing Identification process).

First Nations communities and TVDSB collaborate to support students attending **Standing Stone School** (JK to Grade 6 located on the Oneida Nation of the Thames settlement) or **Antler River Elementary** (JK to Grade 8 school located on the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation). Staffs have opportunities to share in professional learning and dialogue through joint meetings throughout the school year. As well, outlined in the current Tuition Agreements, there is a Special Education Learning Coordinator responsible for "First Nations liaison and communications, and transition of students from Antler River Elementary School and Standing Stone School" (Appendix 5). Opportunities to access specialized supports within TVDSB are available to students with exceptionalities prior to natural transitions<sup>13</sup>

As students from local First Nations communities transition into secondary school, support is provided from the Student Success Team First Nations Sub-committee. The sub-committee is comprised of: administrators, student success teachers, special education representatives, attendance and social work staff, and First Nations student advocates<sup>14</sup>. The teams meet regularly to review student progress and develop individual plans as necessary. During the 2010-2011 school year, an FNMI Student Success Model was developed and piloted for use by school-based teams. The purpose of the model is "to support FNMI students through a proactive and culturally-based wrap-around approach" (TVDSB, 2010f, p. 2). Strategies currently implemented by Secondary Student Success Teams vary by school and student needs.

According to several people interviewed for this review, collaborative efforts over the past three to five years have yielded positive results in terms of developing relationships and accessing supports for students more quickly (e.g., quicker access to technology upon transitioning).

<sup>12</sup> Please note that TVDSB's Early and Ongoing Identification process is currently being reviewed including considerations for developing more inclusive and culturally appropriate assessments and strategies.

<sup>13</sup> Students transition to TVDSB from Standing Stone School in Grade 7 and from Antler River Elementary in Grade 9

<sup>14</sup> First Nations Student Advocates provide "Community based prevention and intervention services and activities to support the academic, social and emotional learning for First Nations students at the elementary and secondary schools covered under the tuition agreement" (Tuition Agreement, 2011, Appendix 3).



# Programs



## Culturally Relevant Programming

*Boards will strive to...*

*...develop and implement programs and services that are supportive and reflective of Aboriginal cultures and languages*



Throughout the last five years, consultation and collaboration has resulted in the development and implementation of programs/services supporting FNMI students and reflective of FNMI culture, perspectives, and histories. Among the multifaceted goals of these programs/services is fostering student well-being. TVDSB's strategic plan for improving mental health and supporting students with mental illness has been instrumental in the development and/or ongoing implementation of these programs/services. A special report commissioned by TVDSB to review FNMI perspectives and approaches for supporting mental health, along with consultation with FNMI partners to identify needs of students, continues to inform culturally relevant programming (Mental Health and Wellness Committee, 2010).

## Visiting Elders and Cultural Teachers (VECT)

The Visiting Elders and Cultural Teachers Program (VECT), developed following a series of consultations in 2010<sup>15</sup>, provides resources (i.e., **guidelines**, networking, **funding**) for schools to invite local Elders and Cultural Teachers into their communities to enhance the *Ontario Curriculum*. In 2011-2012, technology was employed to increase access to the VECT program. Interactive webcasts were coordinated for nine VECT visits at elementary schools.

### Benefits of Elders and Cultural Teachers in Schools

1. Share FNMI Knowledge firsthand
2. Promote positive images of FNMI people and cultures in schools
3. Enhance all students' critical thinking skills in relation to history

TVDSB, 2010a, p.7-8

I think they [Elders] should be invited next year to speak because they explained their ways, cultures, traditions, and beliefs very well and they told a different view than our textbooks do.

Grade 12 student reflection, 2011

## Elders and Cultural Teachers in Residence

In response to feedback from some schools expressing a desire to further enhance relationships and learning through the VECT, an Elders and Cultural Teachers in Residence program was piloted in 2012-2013 at six elementary schools. The Board partnered with Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre to integrate opportunities for increasing student and staff knowledge about histories, culture, and perspectives of FNMI peoples.

### Diversity of Uniting Our Nations Programs

- Length: one day to weekly for 16 weeks
- Target Group: all grade 8 FNMI students to 15-20 successful applicants
- Focus: healthy relationships, transitions, leadership, cultural connectedness

## Uniting Our Nations

Programs offered by TVDSB in partnership with CAMH include mentoring, transition conferences, culture camp, and FNMI Student Advisory Council. Collectively these programs are referred to as Uniting Our Nations. These programs are designed to incorporate culturally relevant experiences for FNMI children and youth (Crooks et al, Under review). Specific examples include: traditional stories or cultural teachings, traditional and contemporary dance, drum-making, and traditional ceremony.

## First Nations Counsellors

First Nation Counsellors (FNCs) play a "critical piece in facilitating Aboriginal Student Success at all levels in the school system" (Toulouse 2010, p.6). FNCs provide unique services based on their culturally-appropriate counselling skill set and competencies. Within TVDSB, First Nations counselling supports include individual and family counselling, programming, parent and community engagement, committee work, and facilitating professional learning opportunities. Beginning in 2012-2013, the Board dedicated a partial attendance counsellor caseload to FNMI engagement. The FNMI Engagement Counsellor works collaboratively with Board staff (e.g., teachers, FNCs, administrators) and FNMI communities to support and engage FNMI students and their parents.

<sup>15</sup> See *First Nations Métis & Inuit (FNMI) Visiting Elders & Cultural Teachers Program: Guidelines for Administrators & Teachers* for more information about the consultation process

# Lifelong Learning



Lifelong learning is a priority for the TVDSB. The Board provides these opportunities for teachers in a variety of ways, including teaching tools, professional development, and access to current research in order to more effectively support Aboriginal students. The Board is committed to providing training for teachers about Aboriginal histories, cultures, and perspectives. There are also a number of continuing education opportunities available for FNMI parents.

## Instructional and Assessment Practices

*Boards will strive to...*

*...support teachers in adopting a variety of approaches and tools to teach and assess Aboriginal students more effectively*

*...provide professional development activities focused on the needs of Aboriginal students including students with special education needs*

*...research and promote effective practices for helping Aboriginal students succeed in school*



Over the past five years, a variety of opportunities have been offered to teachers as a means of building educator capacity to more effectively meet the needs of FNMI students. Below, a timeline highlights the evolution of professional learning from 2008-2009 through to 2012-2013. Changes in the type of professional learning opportunities reflects a wider movement across TVDSB, and the Province, from one-time, lecture style presentations

(e.g., one-day sessions) to multi-day more in depth “courses” (e.g., short courses) to ongoing, job-embedded, and educator-driven learning (e.g. networks and inquiry-based learning). Over the years, TVDSB has implemented a variety of formats for delivering professional learning. Data previously gathered following professional learning in conjunction with new information collected for this review, indicates a desire for increased opportunities made accessible to all Board staff. Some stakeholders interviewed for this review suggest mandatory learning about residential schools and intergenerational trauma, the *Indian Act*, local history, and current issues is necessary to reach all staff.

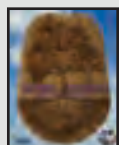


Click on the picture to view the interactive timeline online



Figure 22. Interactive timeline

In addition to offering educators a variety of learning opportunities, TVDSB has collaborated with other School Boards and community organizations to develop resources and evaluate programs. In the winter of 2009, TVDSB was granted funding by the Ministry of Education to convene an Aboriginal Curriculum Writing Task Force. Teachers and community members were invited to apply to join the task force in developing a resource to support the integration of local FNMI perspectives into TVDSB classrooms<sup>1</sup>.



*The Two Paths, One Journey: Culturally Enhanced Curriculum for the Inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Perspectives in Education focuses on connecting Aboriginal Perspectives to Ontario's elementary curriculum in the areas of the Arts, Languages, Math, Physical Education, and Sciences focusing on Grade 4 to Grade 8. More distinctly, this resource brings to light local First Nations perspectives by highlighting the 3 First Nations in the London area within the geographic regions of the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB).*

TVDSB, 2011g, p. 2

The TVDSB FNMI Learning Wheel is another resource, developed in consultation with FNMI partners for use in the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to use the tool, which “uses Anishnabe Medicine Wheel teachings as a source of inspiration to guide students and teachers in reflecting in a wholistic ways that honours the four dimensions of personal development” (TVDSB, 2012e).



Figure 23. Learning Wheel

<sup>1</sup> The curriculum resource document is presently being piloted by Instructional Coaches. Following any revisions based on their input, the document will be more widely distributed for use by TVDSB classroom teachers.

# Lifelong Learning



In addition to providing teachers with enhanced curriculum, TVDSB students, staff, families, and communities identified a need to enhance transition supports for FNMI students. Beginning in 2010-2011, the Board began consultation in the creation of a guide to assist “schools, teachers/staff, parents/guardians, and students in strengthening the transition of First Nations Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students through various phases of their educational journeys” (TVDSB, n.d.g., p. 2). The guide outlines strategies and tips for all stakeholders, as well as relevant resources and directories. The report has been disseminated to schools and is posted on the TVDSB website.

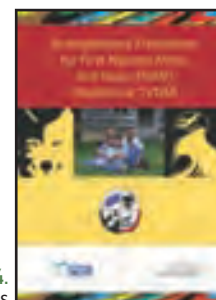


Figure 24.  
Strengthening Transitions



Figure 25. The Fourth R Annual Reports

Beginning in May 2009, the Board partnered with CAMH to evaluate outcomes of some of the existing transition supports and programs facilitated within TVDSB (e.g., Peer Mentoring, Elementary Mentoring, and Transition Conferences). The purpose of the study is twofold. First, to identify what contributes to successful transition from elementary to secondary school. Second, to measure the impact of Fourth R programming (see aforementioned examples) on student outcomes (e.g., achievement, attendance, suspension). Preliminary information is found in *The Fourth R: Uniting Our Nations Annual report* (click on images pictured left to learn more).

## Cultural Awareness

*Boards will strive to offer training for teachers about Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives.*



Between 2008-2009 and 2012-2013, the Board, in collaboration with local FNMI communities has coordinated a number of opportunities for staff to learn more about FNMI histories, cultures, and perspectives. In February 2011, Brent Stonefish, educator and author, led over 60 social workers and school counsellors through a workshop on the intergenerational impacts of residential schools.

During the following year, two groups of staff (i.e., 25 secondary school teachers and 45 educational assistants) participated in a similar learning experience. Both groups visited Chippewas of the Thames First Nation to learn more about the effects of residential schooling, local culture, and community life.

Several additional opportunities have been provided for staff to increase their knowledge and understanding about FNMI ways of knowing. For example, information about relationships with local FN communities, the importance of language, history of education, and First Nations rights in Canada have been disseminated throughout TVDSB and the broader community via the Board website, at workshops, and community events (i.e., via **Our Shared Vision**). Professional learning was embedded into many of the FNMI Student Achievement Committee meetings including traditional openings led by Elders (e.g., smudging, storytelling, round dancing) and the sharing of information regarding:

- ☀ Indigenous ways of knowing (e.g., **Four Directions Teachings**);
- ☀ diversity of TVDSB FNMI population;
- ☀ historical context (e.g., impact of residential schools); and
- ☀ rights of FNMI peoples (e.g., **Treaties**, tuition agreements).

In September 2011, the Board held a Religious Accommodation Learning Conference for staff. The outgoing and interim FNMI Education Advisors co-led a breakout session at the conference focused on accommodating the unique needs of FNMI learners. The **presentation** covered a number of topics including colonization of education, traditional beliefs and practices, and ceremonial observances.



Figure 26.  
Mount Elgin Residential School (1909)



Figure 27.  
Excerpt from *Our Shared Vision* (2010)



Figure 28.  
Religious Accommodation Learning Conference

# Lifelong Learning



In May 2013, members of the Board's senior administration team and system level staff joined together for a cultural sensitivity training workshop. The full day session was led by Maya Chacaby, Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres' Cultural Competency Education Coordinator. Group members participated in an activity that simulated how removing cultural ceremony, Elders, and children from their communities through colonial policies and practices, including residential schools, fractured those communities. Several participants commented on how powerful the experience was and suggested the experience be extended for those who participated in the initial training and expanded to other Board staff.

Cultural sensitivity training was a powerful experience...although we can never completely understand the residential school experiences, we can appreciate the impact it has on families and our students.

Interviewee, 2013

## Continuing Education for Parents

*Boards will strive to provide continuing education programs for Aboriginal parents.*

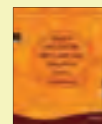


Figure 29. Parents as Partners brochure

Learning opportunities were offered for FNMI parents including a First Nations family language course piloted in 2010 and parent engagement sessions organized by TVDSB's FNMI Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) in 2012. FNMI PIC collaborated with the three First Nations communities to organize three parent engagement sessions, in which the combined attendance was approximately 200.

Information about FNMI PIC, supporting children in educational transitions, mental health, and parenting skills were shared at the sessions. TVDSB and Lambton Kent DSB Continuing Education Departments partnered with the Indigenous Education Coalition to develop and deliver a family based language program (click [here](#) to learn more about the course). In TVDSB, 26 people participated in the course offered in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. As a result of the relatively small number of participants, the program did not continue beyond the pilot period. Through TVDSB's Adult and Continuing Education, adults have access to a variety of courses and programs (e.g., skilled trades, personal support worker) in London, St. Thomas, Strathroy, Tillsonburg, and Woodstock.





## What is cultural connectedness?

*“Enculturation (or cultural connectedness) is distinguished from acculturation, which is the degree of assimilation to majority or dominant culture. Enculturation refers to the degree of integration within a culture – it is intra-cultural...An enculturated youth might in fact be bicultural, identifying with both traditional Indigenous and mainstream, or majority, cultures simultaneously.”*

*Fleming & Ledogar, 2008, p. 50*

## Why is it important for youth to be enculturated?

*“Strong connections with traditional culture by “identifying as member of the nation, participating in traditional practices, and adopting its worldview buffers the negative effects of discrimination and counteracts the detrimental feelings of historical loss”.*

*Shoemaker, 2010, p. 14*

## How is cultural connectedness measured?

*In general, three components are used to measure enculturation:*

- ☀ participation in traditional activities (e.g., Pow-Wows, drum-making)*
- ☀ degree of cultural identification (e.g., pride, importance of culture)*
- ☀ traditional spirituality (e.g., wholeness and balance)*

## PARTICIPATION IN TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES THROUGH SCHOOL

Over the past five years, under the leadership of TVDSB’s FNMI Education Advisor and in collaboration with community and organizations, many FNMI students have had numerous opportunities to participate in traditional activities.

Events available across TVDSB include the week long Indigenous Arts Festival in 2011 and full day Aboriginal Cultural Festival in 2012. Both events provided FNMI and non-FNMI students with opportunities to learn about FNMI cultures and participate in a variety of activities (e.g., traditional and contemporary singing, dancing, beadwork, soapstone/wood carving). In total, over 500 students participated in 2011 and over 800 students attended the 2012 event.

Several system-supported initiatives engaged a smaller number of students with prolonged or more intense opportunities. During the 2011-2012 school year, Métis canoemaker and cultural teacher, Marcel Labelle, worked with a group of students from Beal to build a birchbark canoe. In commemoration of the creation of their canoe, students portaged from Beal to Centennial Hall to celebrate their accomplishment and welcome Theo Fluery.



Figure 30. [Link to canoe project video](#)



# Cultural Connectedness



In the past three years (2011, 2012, 2013) TVDSB has partnered with CAMH to offer cultural leadership camp opportunities for 81 FNMI Secondary School students. The three day, two night adventure camp experience integrates leadership skill development into culturally relevant activities such as drum-making, archery, and round dance (see **overview** of the camp & sample **schedule**). TVDSB mentoring programs delivered by CAMH also incorporate cultural teachings, traditional stories, and activities.

In its initial year, nine Grade 8 and 9 students from the Board's peer Leadership program traveled to **Nmaachihna Indigenous Enviro-Education Centre** in culmination of their time together in the program. The students learned traditional teachings and participated in traditional ceremonies.

## CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

Although overall student enrolment numbers are declining, the number of students self-identifying as FNMI has increased from 1046 in 2008-2009 to over 1500 as of October 31, 2013. The increase may be partly attributed to the fact that the FNMI population is the youngest and fastest growing group in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2010); however, the numbers have increased across all divisions (e.g., the number of students self-identifying in secondary schools has increased 70% from 2008-2009). Some interviewees speculate this increase is reflective of families and students seeing value in identifying and feeling more connected to and proud of their FNMI ancestry.

Program specific information has been gathered over the past five years (e.g., Peer Mentoring, Elementary Mentoring, FNMI Student Advisory Council) that speaks to feelings of pride and cultural connectedness. Examples that suggest a number of students participating in these programs have a positive and strong affiliation with their FNMI culture are displayed on page 27.



Figure 31. Cultural leadership camp (2013)

My most memorable experience...when we made the drums...it gave me a chance to learn about my culture which means a lot to me.

*Culture camp participant, (2012)*



The culture piece was awesome! I think there should be more stuff like this.

*Peer Leader, (2012)*

Figure 32. Nmaachihna Indigenous Enviro-Education Centre

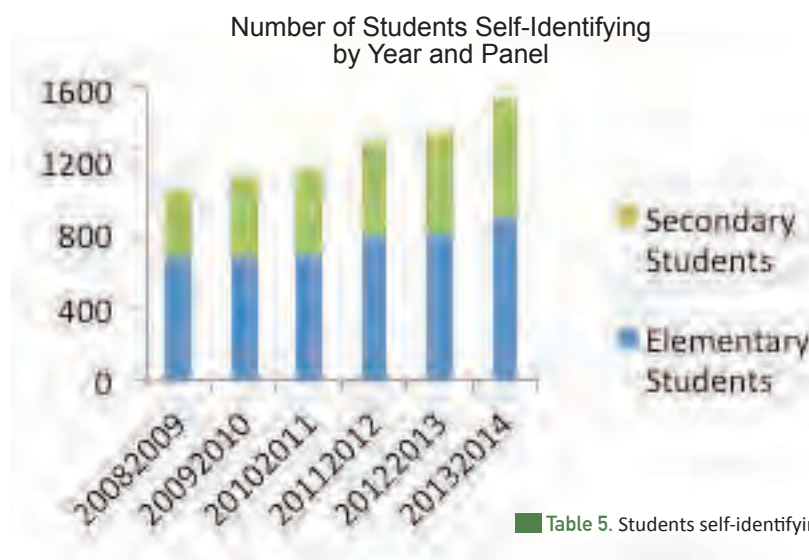


Table 5. Students self-identifying by year and panel



Click on the pictures to learn more or hear the students share their stories



The entire culture camp experience was very memorable and very important to me because it provided a sense of connection with my roots...

*Culture camp participant, 2012*



It made me feel really important...that we're getting recognized for something culturally that we did in the community.

**Brittany Anwyll,**  
Beal Student

■ **Figure 33.** Student cultural identification stories

*One of the students had a dream and in the dream she saw three spirits painted on the canoe - a wolf, a bear and a turtle and that's what the canoe name means. Niswi Totem Cheemaun - three spirit canoe.*

Over the past year and a half, the Board has initiated a number of steps that are reflective of a more wholistic approach to programming for all students. Specifically, revisions to the Board Improvement Plan include a focus on student engagement and well-being, and working towards integrating Safe and Accepting Schools, Equity and Inclusive Education, and Mental Health portfolios.

There are, however, TVDSB students struggling to navigate between their home/community life and school. During the summer of 2012, TVDSB contracted a TVDSB student and a social worker to learn more about barriers FNMI students face in school. Students, parents, and community members raised a number of concerns including difficulties faced by students in “preserving their cultural identity, while experiencing a greater sense of inclusion in the school community” (**Lalonde & Tabobondung, 2012, p. 2**). Members of the 2012-2013 FNMI Student Advisory Council identified “ignorance, racism and cultural insensitivity” among the most important issues that FNMI students face in school. Several members expressed fear or difficulty in expressing pride due to perceived negative reactions from others (**Hughes et al., 2013, p. 18-19**).

## TRADITIONAL SPIRITUALITY

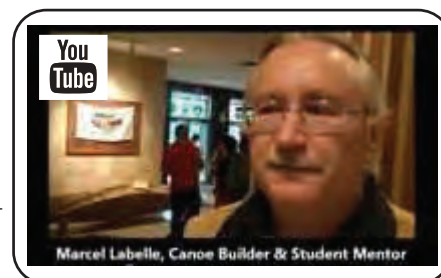
Reference is made to the spiritual dimension of the First Nations programming facilitated by CAMH in partnership with TVDSB (Crooks et al, Under review) and is evident in this student's reflection following their participation at culture camp in 2012:

*My most memorable experience was at the culture camp when we made the drums. Not only did I learn to make a drum, but I learned what all was involved during the process. I was also able to get the chance to awaken my drum and even learned to play a song.*

Spiritual experiences are integral to each person's learning journey...spiritual experiences are equated with knowledge in itself and are manifested in the physical world through ceremony, vision quests and dreams.

*Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 29*

Another example illustrating spiritual outcomes for students is found in an interview with Marcel Labelle. Following the portage of the canoe made by Beal students under the guidance of Marcel, he shared the **story** behind the making and naming of the canoe:



■ **Figure 34.**  
Link to interview with Marcel Labelle

# Cultural Connectedness

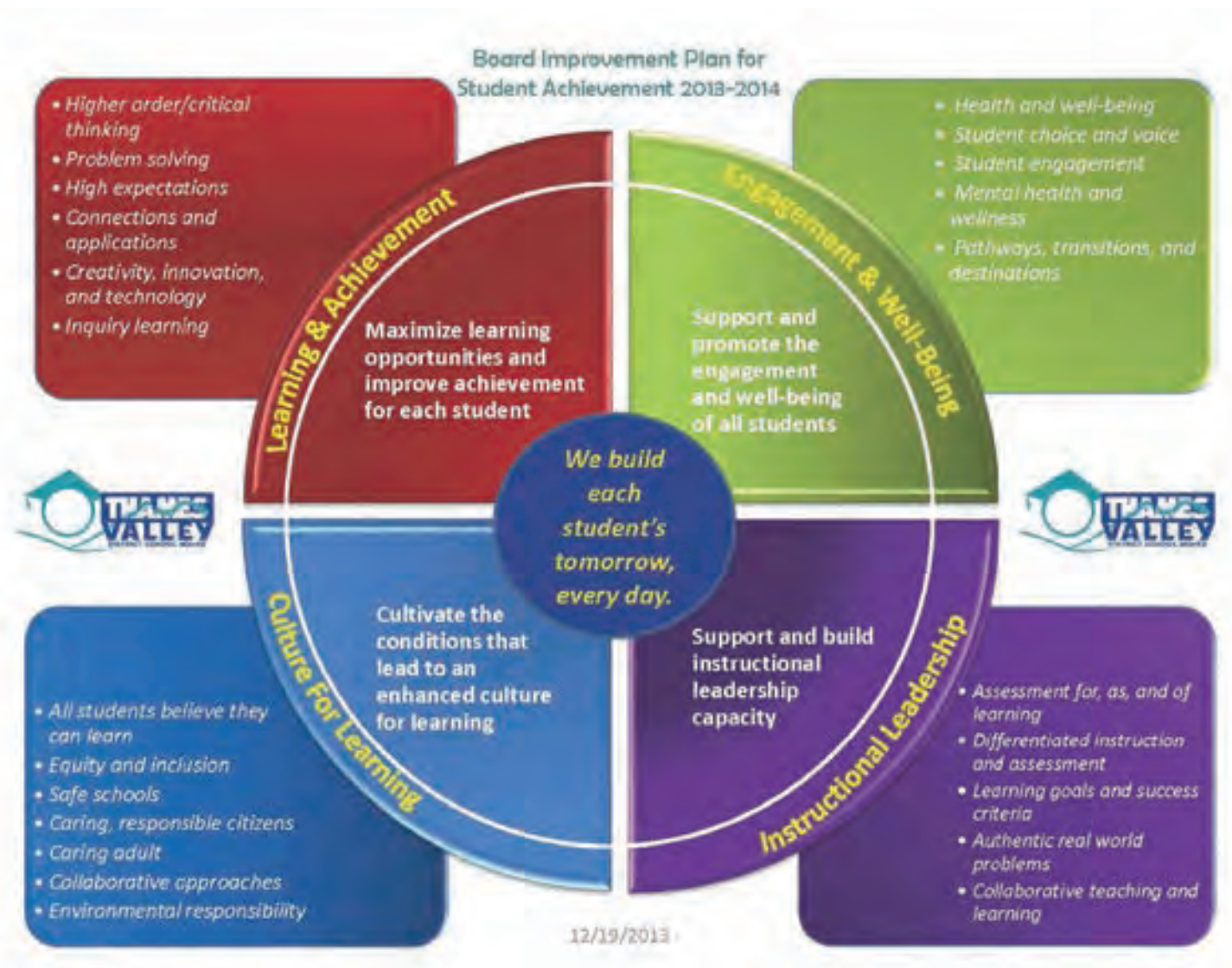


Figure 35. Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement, (2013-2014).



# Sense of Belonging



## What is Sense of Belonging?

Sense of belonging encompasses a range of individual needs for interpersonal and emotional connection with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Powelson, 1991). It includes affection between people, the need for positive regard from others, and the need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1993; Murray 1933; Vallerand, 1997). Educational systems in general, and school structures in particular, can make a difference in students' feelings of school-connectedness by providing a safe, welcoming, and inclusive environment.

Theorists in the field of positive youth development discuss the importance of the school environment in general terms referring to “developmental assets” that include “school connection” and “school engagement”.

School environments can achieve their objective by providing students with autonomy, belongingness, and competence.

CAMH & TVDSB, 2013.

## Why is Sense of Belonging Important?

Overall, students who feel a sense of belonging will demonstrate positive academic and psychological outcomes (Anderman, Brendtro et al, 2002; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). One focus group participant explained, “At the end of the day, all kids want to be successful. When they’re not, they’re embarrassed and they don’t go to school.” In comparison, students who do not experience feelings of belonging are at-risk for unhealthy behaviours and decreased engagement in school.

## What do FNMI students in TVDSB say about Sense of belonging?

A main theme expressed by FNMI students relates to the lack of respect and fairness they felt from staff and other students (First Nations Focus Group, 2012).

Stereotypes, assumptions, language and tone, lack of awareness regarding history, culture, and personal situations were all identified as factors that instigate disrespect. Suggestions from students on how to create a more respectful school environment include:

- ☀ honour and respect students as individuals;
- ☀ treat all students fairly;
- ☀ be supportive; and
- ☀ encourage students to do their best.

Some of the data about FNMI students' perceptions of sense of belonging is not very positive. Yet, this data can be contrasted with other school specific examples for a different perspective. For example, data from one urban priority high school (UPHS) shows all students reported greater feelings of belongingness at school in 2010-2011 compared to 2009-2010 (60% vs. 54% respectively)(CAMH & TVDSB, 2011). At the same school over a different time period, all students reported greater feelings of belongingness at school (2012-2013 compared to 2011-2012; 71% vs. 69%)(CAMH & TVDSB, 2013). While this data is not FNMI student specific, it does highlight that intentionally focusing programming on aspects of school climate can have positive effects on students' perceived sense of belonging. The table provides more information about the multiple aspects of sense of belonging. These findings suggest school-level programming focused on increasing FNMI students' connection to school is making a difference.

Table 6: Self-reported impact of programming on relationships and belonging

| Item                                                                                    | % Agree or Strongly Agree |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| I feel a sense of belonging while participating in these programs.                      | 90%                       |
| These programs have helped me feel involved at school.                                  | 85%                       |
| I have met new friends through these programs.                                          | 90%                       |
| I look forward to participating in these programs.                                      | 82%                       |
| The skills I learned in these programs have been useful for communicating with friends. | 95%                       |
| I would recommend these programs to a friend.                                           | 88%                       |

Specific questions asked of students involved in peer mentoring indicated development of relationship skills specific to the peer mentoring context:

| Items asked only to Peer Mentoring participants                                                  | % Agree or Strongly Agree |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| In peer mentoring, I learned new things about friendships and relationships.                     | 100%                      |
| In peer mentoring, I learned where to find support if I need help for myself or a friend.        | 100%                      |
| In a potentially difficult situation, I was able to delay, negotiate or refuse my way out of it. | 100%                      |
| In life outside school, I have used peer mentoring skills to build healthy relationships.        | 89%                       |

Figure 36. Excerpt from UPHS report (2013)

# Sense of Belonging



## What do Administrators say about Sense of Belonging?

In the Uniting our Nations reports from CAMH several administrators speak about the positive contributions of Fourth R programming in increasing all students sense of belonging.

As one administrator described: “Fourth R gives them a sense of belonging. Administrators speak positively about programming designed to increase school culture and foster sense of belonging in students. I think without them having something that they themselves can relate to in school, it doesn’t have the same kind of impact or meaning for them. It takes a student who is very extroverted to not worry about that but when we are looking at a number of students that are very shy, if they don’t feel a connection through their culture, they are just getting dropped off and picked up, they are not really engaged with what is going on in the building. Having that cultural piece where they feel welcome and they feel wanted and they feel like they can contribute that is a huge part for many of our students. Especially our young ladies because they are very shy. The group we have, I am not saying this is a group for everyone, they are very shy but they have been able to come out of their shells. They are able to share and talk about things because they feel proud for who they are” (Crooks et al, n.d.).

## Sense of Belonging and School Transitions

A welcoming school environment is one with social and cultural supports and which promotes a sense of belonging. The transition from local First Nations community schools to TVDSB schools and from elementary to secondary school can be especially challenging for some FNMI students. Some students commented that they felt they have been unfairly punished for missing class time to attend cultural events (Focus Group, 2011). These negative perceptions and experiences limit a positive sense of belonging within the school community. These feelings may be intensified by lack of understanding or cultural competency that others may hold.

TVDSB has been working to intentionally cultivate a positive sense of belonging with programming that supports students during the transition and beyond. Students who have attended these conferences report a heightened sense of belonging and a feeling of being supported within TVDSB. The conferences have been extended to include not only a fall and spring event but also to provide ongoing support and mentorship throughout the year.

There remains a need for increased collaboration between First Nations education authorities and school boards to ensure that First Nations students receive the preparation they need to succeed when they make the transition to provincially funded schools.



Figure 37. Transition flyer

Some stakeholders interviewed for this review suggest transition programs should be expanded to include students and their parents. Continuing to strengthen supports for FNMI students and their parents prior to, during, and after transitions is pivotal in fostering engagement and a sense of belonging at school.

In addition, greater collaboration between TVDSB and local post-secondary institutions, specific to the diverse needs of FNMI students, would enhance transitions. Developing a collaborative working relationship and potential joint initiatives with both Western University and Fanshawe College are strategies for:

- ☀ providing students with greater exposure to the post-secondary environment;
- ☀ creating links between their current schooling and future opportunities; and
- ☀ increased exposure to positive FNMI role models.



# Sense of Belonging



## Sense of Belonging and Mental Wellness

Belonging is very important for children's mental health and overall well-being. One TVDSB high school student described, "inside the classroom there is often a barrier between the student and teacher. Understanding one another is important" (Crooks et al, n.d.). Teachers have spoken out as well, requesting: "Better educate us about FNMI culture" and "more direction from administration"(Interview, 2013).



■ Figure 38. Image of Welcome brochure from TVDSB.

When students feel a sense of belonging they are more motivated to learn and more likely to be engaged in learning (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow & Grady, 1993). When a sense of belonging is diminished, students may feel heightened negative emotions and a lack of investment in schooling. Some comments from FNMI Student Advisory Council members (2011) demonstrate this:"

*"There is a lot of ignorance about FNMI history and culture at my school. Racism due to ignorance occurs sometimes."*

*"There are barriers to being aboriginal in a place that doesn't really allow you to express it."*

*"Stereotypes play a big part in what FNMI students face in and outside of the school environment."*

Positive sense of belonging is prohibited when stereotypes and racism prevail. In a 2011 focus group, FNMI students describe examples of disrespectful behavior by teachers as: dirty looks; hearing a different tone compared to other students; confusion about Native status because they don't look Native, or don't have a typical Native name; and being subjected to offensive comments ("eating bark", "making it rain"). There is a need for educators to visibly and verbally counter these misunderstandings.

Educators can bear in mind a schools' climate discussion with an FNMI student who said, "FNMI students felt that staff members believe everybody is from the 'rez' and that all FNMI students are uninterested in school". Students felt "that they are often categorized into one group ("native") and are not treated as individuals with unique interests, experiences, and goals." This review highlights the need to promote a positive sense of belonging that honours the diversity of FNMI students as a mechanism for advancing wholistic student wellness.

To promote a sense of belonging and mental wellness we must see each student as an individual with a specific set of strengths and challenges.

As one educator commented, "this year one of our former [FNMI] mentors is the co-president of the school. So it's been really nice to see the kids get involved, they are committed..." (Crooks et al, n.d.).

While there is great value in drawing on shared understandings and experiences, to positively increase sense of belonging there must be respect for the individual. Difficulties with sense of belonging will be easier to overcome when students feel that they are valued for their specific contributions.



■ Figure 39. Student artwork

# Sense of Belonging



## Sense of Belonging and Extracurricular Activities

Research suggests that involvement in extracurricular activities heightens a sense of belonging (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). Involvement within the TVDSB community comes in many forms. As one TVDSB student indicated, “I like to be involved with First Nations issues and would like to discuss more” (FNMI Student Advisory Council, 2011). Many students express a desire to belong to extracurricular activities within the school and can articulate the impact of this sense of belonging. One example of student voice comes through in the student-led film, *Through Our Eyes*. Students in this video describe what ‘Native’ kids feel and interviews teachers for their responses. A connection between extracurricular and sense of belonging is also described in multiple Urban Priority High School reports. (CAMH & TVDSB; 2012; 2013), where students who participated on the FNMI student council connected their school pride with overall feelings of belonging.

Students on the FNMI student council believed that their involvement has similarly improved their school pride and sense of belonging, which may positively impact academic outcomes.

However, these students also expressed frustration at their perception that the council is not taken as seriously as the larger student council and their lack of involvement in the broader school community

CAMH & TVDSB, 2013

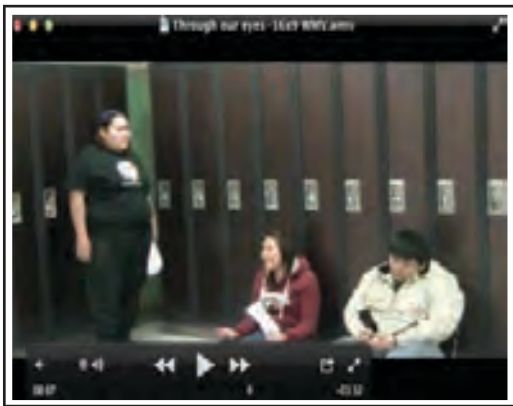


Figure 40. Link to *Through Our Eyes* Video

All students have the opportunity to participate in numerous TVDSB clubs, activities, and initiatives. FNMI students have expressed difficulty getting involved because of transportation concerns. Many identified the distance to and from their homes, as well as the availability of bussing as barriers to their participation. Teachers who are aware of the importance of FNMI participation have suggested, “promoting inclusive activities for all students, including ‘FNMI’ courses and clubs.” FNMI students also expressed a desire for more non-FNMI students to become involved in these courses and clubs. An additional step that could be taken is to remove the FNMI labels from some courses. For example, rather than having a course called “Native History,” focus group participants from one school suggested that the course could simply be renamed “North American History” or “History of Turtle Island.” Much in the same way, the names of some clubs could be changed to increase the perception of inclusivity.

In addition to school-based activities, TVDSB has offered many system-wide activities to enhance sense of belonging (e.g., culture camp, indigenous arts festival). Also, in collaboration with others, TVDSB has promoted community-wide events that reach out to students, parents, and beyond.

# Attendance



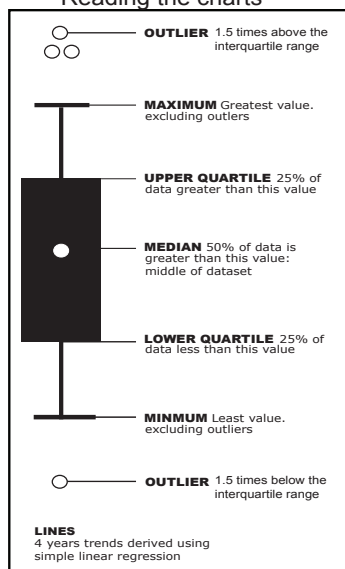
## Why does attendance matter?

Children who frequently miss or are late to school fail to benefit from teacher instruction and modeling, peer interactions, and other activities designed to scaffold learning. Indeed, there is a growing body of research linking attendance and academic achievement, such that as absenteeism increases, school performance declines (Gottfried, 2009, 2011; Reynolds et al., 1992; Steward et al. 2008 as cited in Morrissey, et al., 2013, p.2).

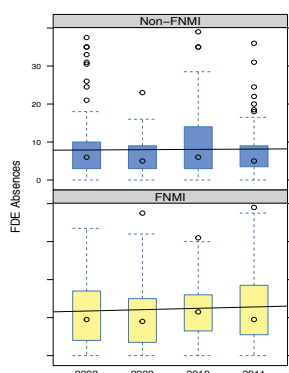
## Attendance Trends

Analysis of four years of attendance data (i.e., 2008-2009 to 2011-2012) indicates that, on average, there is more variability and higher levels of absenteeism among students who identify as FNMI compared with non-FNMI students. These differences are observed across all divisions. For all students, the higher the grade, the more absenteeism observed. By the time FNMI students are in Grades 11 and 12, the average full day equivalent absences (FDE) are approximately 54% higher than in the Intermediate division (i.e., Grades 7–8). The charts below show full day equivalent (FDE) absenteeism trends by division for non-FNMI students (on the top in blue), compared with FNMI students (on the bottom in yellow).

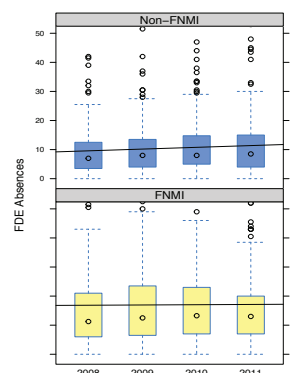
### Reading the charts



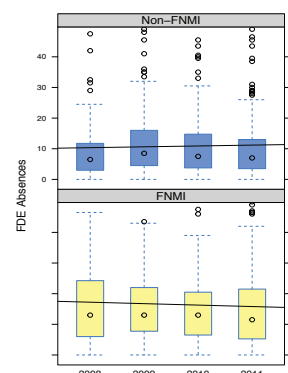
Absenteeism Trends for Early Years



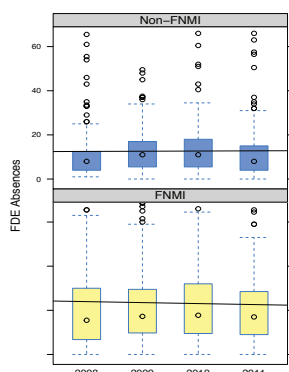
Absenteeism Trends for Primary



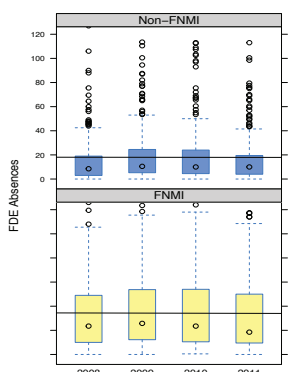
Absenteeism Trends for Junior



Absenteeism Trends for Intermediate



Absenteeism Trends for Grades 9 – 10



Absenteeism Trends for Grades 11 – 12

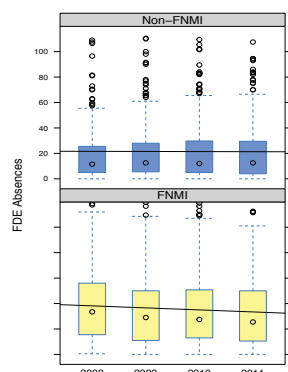


Table 6. Absenteeism trends by division.

### Notes:

- Non-FNMI group matched on gender, grade, and school code.
- All cases are included in calculations; however some outliers have been excluded from the plots.
- Between 100-290 students per division each year.
- Click [here](#) to link to the full report.

1 Half day absences data for the 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years was extracted from Trillium, TVDSB's student information management system. Full day equivalent (FDE) absences were calculated by summing the half days and dividing by two. Student enrolment data as of October 31st 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 was matched with FDE absences data.

# Attendance



## What motivates students to attend class/school?

Findings from the 2012 FNMI Student Voice Conference on attendance suggest students are motivated to attend class/school for many different reasons including future aspirations, class and school environments, and relationships with friends and families.

## What are some of the barriers to attending class /school?

Over the years, students, staff, parents, and community members have identified a number of barriers they feel discourage some FNMI students from attending class/school on a more regular basis. FNMI student perceptions about attendance have been collected through a number of forums over the past few years, including:

- ☀ 2011 *Through Our Eyes* Short Film;
- ☀ 2012 **Student Voice Conference**;
- ☀ 2012 **Student Engagement Project**; and
- ☀ 2012-2013 **Student Advisory Council**.

FNMI students listed the following barriers to attendance:

- ☀ feelings of hopelessness;
- ☀ conflict with peers and teachers (e.g., bullying, stereotyping, racism, peer pressure);
- ☀ academic barriers (e.g., school work too easy or too difficult),
- ☀ mental health issues; and
- ☀ physical barriers (e.g., lack of sleep, employment, substance abuse).

Specifically, in relation to transition from local First Nations community schools to TVDSB provincial schools, FNMI students referred to:

- ☀ “[feeling]...disconnected not only academically, but socially”;
- ☀ “feeling overwhelmed and frustrated by the significant time spent on the bus each day” (Lalonde & Tabobondung, 2012, p. 2);
- ☀ succumbing to pressure by some of their peers to skip class during the bus ride.



Figure 41. Summary of students' views (2012)

...I am here to talk about racism and discrimination and Native kids. Does it affect them going to class? Does it affect them and their attendance? Yes, I think it does and because of that, that's why I think most Native kids nowadays skip...

Excerpt from *Through Our Eyes*, 2011



# Attendance



Following the release of *Through Our Eyes*, members of the First Nations Advisory Committee (FNAC) were asked to share their views on attendance including barriers, effective strategies, and possible next steps. Specific issues raised in the meeting include:

- ☀ Residential School Syndrome (e.g., mistrust in educational institution, unresolved conflict/trauma, lack of value placed on education);
- ☀ substance abuse;
- ☀ resisting acculturation; and
- ☀ the perceived absence of caring adults for students to connect with (**FNAC meeting minutes, May 17, 2011**).

Succeeding this discussion, a working group was convened to further explore the issue of school attendance among FNMI students, as well as possible strategies to reduce absenteeism. The FNMI Attendance Working Group began meeting in spring 2011 to further investigate students' experiences in TVDSB regarding motivators and barriers to attending school. The group was a sub-committee of the FNMI Student Achievement Committee comprised of First Nations community members and TVDSB staff.

## How can we work together to improve attendance?

Recognizing the important link between attendance, engagement, and achievement, stakeholders have provided ideas on how to both reduce and remove barriers, as well as increasing motivation and incentives. In 2012, the FNMI Attendance Working Group presented **recommendations** to FNAC based on findings from stakeholder input, relevant literature, and local data. Overall recommendations of the group include:

- ☀ broadening focus from student attendance to student engagement;
- ☀ employing a collaborative and wholistic approach;
- ☀ re-visioning towards a conceptual model of shared responsibility, as articulated by students at the FNMI Student Voice Conference held in February 2012 (TVDSB, 2013c).

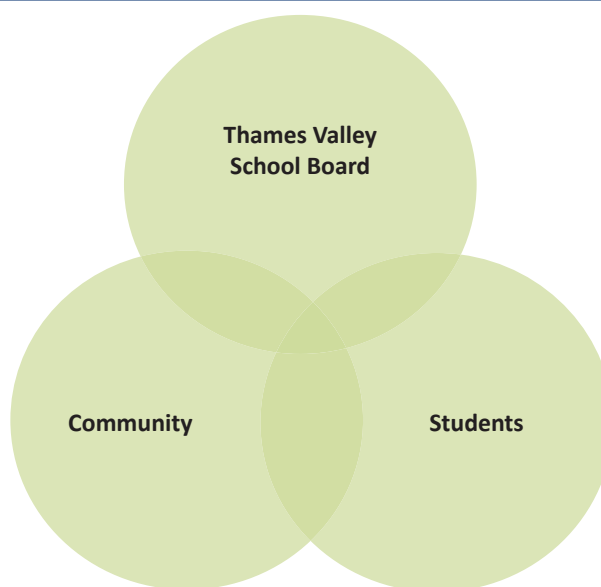


Figure 42. Revised conceptual model for working together

# Achievement



There are a number of system-wide standardized assessments that are employed to measure student achievement in the areas of literacy and numeracy. Each of these assessments plays an important role by allowing for efficient comparisons of student achievement. This section provides an overview of some of these assessments, as well as samples of the data from these assessments that is relevant to FNMI students.

## What is “Phonological Awareness” and why is it important?

One of the skills necessary to achieve success in reading is a child’s ability to understand how speech connects to print. Children must understand how speech is made up of sounds and how these sounds can be represented by the letters of the alphabet. Before a child can “sound out” words they must have “Phonological Awareness” or early literacy skills that involve such tasks as rhyming, identifying the beginning, middle and ending sounds of words, determining the number of words in sentences or number of syllables in words, and blending sounds into words. These skills are necessary, but not sufficient, in learning to read.

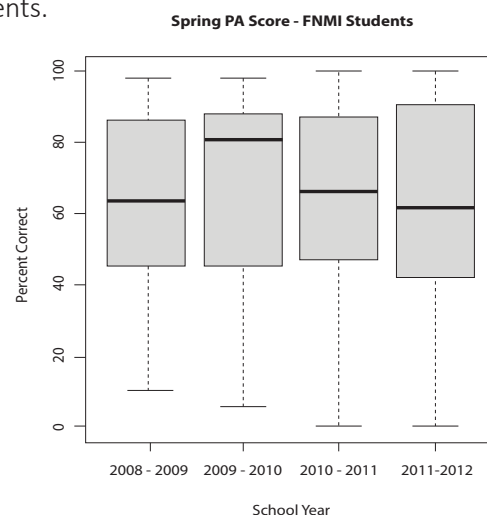


Table 7. PA Score (2008-2012)

## Assessing “Phonological Awareness”

Every fall and spring, senior kindergarten students’ phonological awareness is assessed by TVDSB’s Speech and Language Pathologists (SLP). The Phonological Awareness Screening tool (PA), developed over a decade ago by the Board’s SLPs in collaboration with Research and Assessment Services, provides staff with important information to better support students with their literacy development. Results at the TVDSB indicate that students who show a delay in the acquisition of phonological awareness skills in kindergarten may also demonstrate later difficulties in reading, as measured on the Grade 3 EQAO reading assessment.

## PA Scores Over Time<sup>1</sup>

Between 2008-2009 and 2011-2012, no statistically significant change in average score on the spring PA assessment has been observed for self-identified students (based on simple linear regression calculated using four data points). Over this time period, self-identified FNMI students scored lower than their non-self-identified peers; specifically, an average of 20 percentage points in the fall and 15 percentage points in the spring. As noted, the gap closed slightly between the fall and spring assessment periods.



Figure 43. EQAO history and influence

## Education, Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics

In the spring of each year, Ontario conducts province-wide tests to assist schools, Boards, and the Province with improving literacy and numeracy supports and instruction. Tests are based on the Ontario Curriculum and are administered in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 to assess knowledge and skills of students over time. Additional information about the assessments, including school, Board, and Provincial results, is available in the resource pictured at the left or by visiting [www.eqao.com](http://www.eqao.com).

<sup>1</sup> Analysis was performed as part of an Annual Indicator Report on achievement and attendance for self-identified students. Based on self-identification and enrolment as of the Ministry of Education’s October 31st count date.

<sup>2</sup> The number of students within each year ranges from 39 to 53. It is important to note that there are a range of scores within each year; specifically, students score anywhere from 0% to 100% on the assessment.

# Achievement



## Primary Division (Grades 1–3) Results

The percent of self-identified Grade 3 students achieving at or above provincial standards (i.e., Level 3 or 4) on the Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Assessments varies from year to year<sup>1</sup>. Generally speaking, five year trends show little to no change. Results for 2012-2013 of students who self-identified as FNMI within TVDSB are lower than that of FNMI students across the Province. Percentage point differences range from three in Primary Mathematics and Reading to 11 in Writing. Differences in performance on the EQAO Primary Assessment are more pronounced when comparing results of all students with students who self-identify as FNMI. Based on last year's scores, the gap is larger at the Provincial level than within TVDSB (see *Primary EQAO Assessment Results chart*).

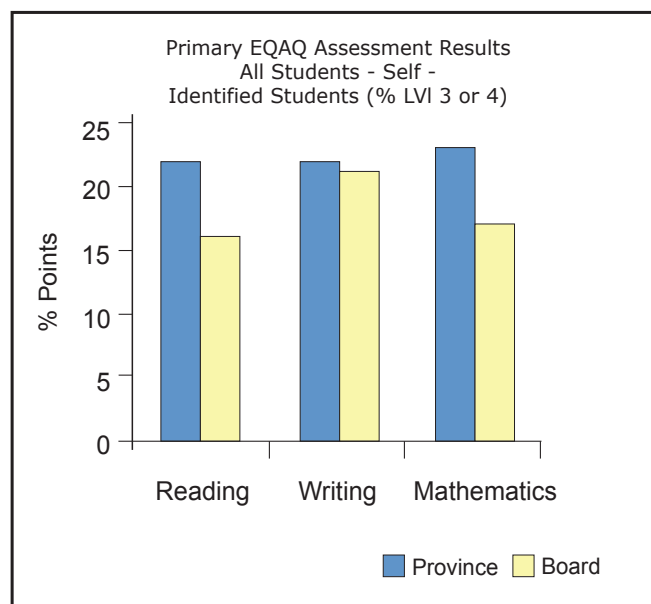


Table 8. Primary EQAO results (2012-2013)

## Junior Division (Grades 4–6) Results

Results for the Junior Division are similar to those in the Primary Division; more specifically, percentages of students achieving level 3 or 4 vary year to year and between assessments and five year trends are flat. Differences in achievement (2012-2013) between Provincial and Board results for students who self-identify are wider than those observed for the Primary Division (i.e., 18, 16, 11 percentage points for Reading, Writing, and Mathematics). The achievement gap (i.e., percent at or above expectations) between all students and self-identified FNMI students was more pronounced at the Board than in the Province for the 2012-2013 school year (see *Junior EQAO Assessment Results*).

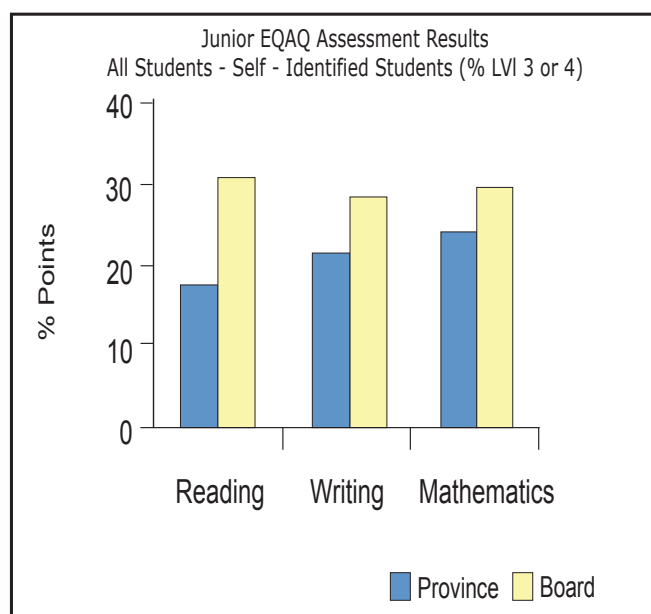


Table 9. Junior EQAO results (2012-2013)

<sup>1</sup> The number of students within each cohort is relatively small (i.e., between 50-90 in Grade 3 & 6); which contributes to greater year to year fluctuations.



## EQAO Grade 9 Mathematics

Students enrolled in Grade 9 academic or applied math are required to complete the EQAO test. The test is administered in January to students enrolled in math during first-semester and in June for second-semester and full-year courses. As with all EQAO Assessments, the test measures skills that students are expected to have learned based on *The Ontario Curriculum*.

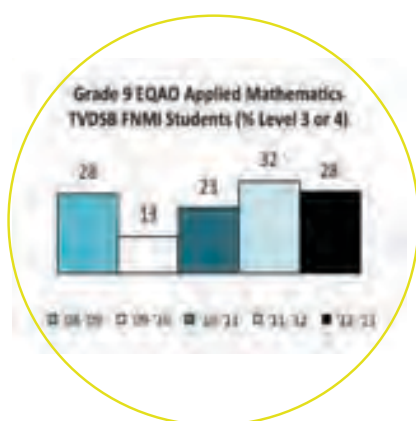


Table 10. Applied Math EQAO results

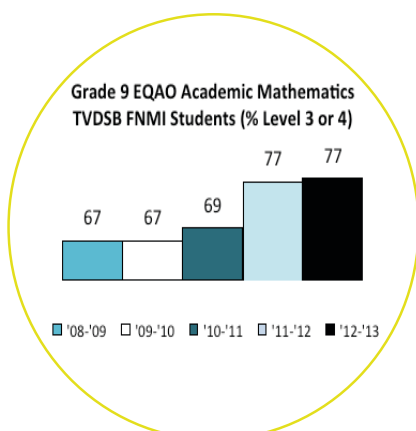


Table 11. Academic Math EQAO results

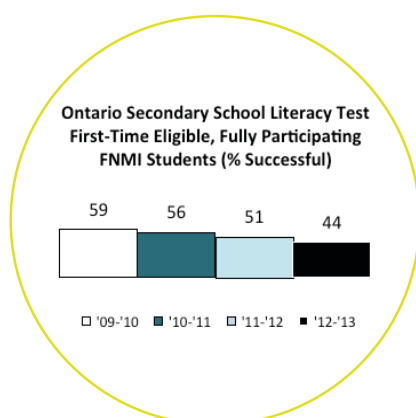


Table 12. OSSLT results

## Applied Mathematics

Over the past five years, the percent of grade 9 FNMI students achieving at or above provincial standards fluctuates from a low of 13 in 2009-2010 to 32 and 28 in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 respectively (n = 39, 87, 67). Last year, achievement levels of FNMI students across the Province were five percentage points higher compared with FNMI students in TVDSB. The gap between Board level results and results specific to FNMI students is similar to those observed at the Province; specifically, 14 points within TVDSB and 11 points for the Province.

## Academic Mathematics

The number of students who have self-identified and are enrolled in grade 9 academic math has more than doubled in the past five years (i.e., n = 15 in 2008-2009, n = 35 in 2012-2013). There has also been a steady increase in the percentage of students performing at level 3 or 4 (i.e., 10 point increase). In 2012-2013, a higher percentage of FNMI students met or exceeded provincial standards within TVDSB compared to the Province (i.e., 77% vs. 69%) and the gap between FNMI student results and Board level results was 8 points smaller than observed in the Province.

## Literacy Test (OSSLT)

The OSSLT measures minimum literacy standards across all subjects to the end of Grade 9. Students take the test in Grade 10. As successful completion is a requirement for graduation, students who do not pass the test can rewrite the following year or enroll in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC).

For the past four years, there has been a steady decline in the percent of first-time eligible writers passing the OSSLT. Last year, Provincial success rates for first-time eligible and fully participating FNMI students was 15 points higher than rates in TVDSB (i.e., 59% vs. 44%). Since 2009-2010, Board and Provincial level success rates for all students have declined from 82% to 77% and 85% to 82% respectively. The gap between all students and FNMI student results is wider at the Board level than it is Provincially.



# Achievement



## Credit Accumulation

Research indicates that students who successfully achieve 16 credits by the end of Grade 10 are more likely to graduate with their peers (Ministry of Education, retrieved, January 7, 2014 from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/bpr/faq.html#2>). Attaining 8 credits per year is a strong indicator of graduating within four years of entering high school. The cohort method of calculation follows students over time as specified by the Ministry. For example, year 2 (Grade 10) credit accumulation, student-level data is tracked over two school years (Grade 9 and Grade 10) to measure the number/percentage of students who earned 16 or more credits by the end of the second school year. Additional criteria apply to the selection of the student cohort (click [here](#) to learn more about the method of calculation).

Grade 9 Cohort Credit Accumulation

| School Year | 5.9 or Less Credits | 6 or 7.9 Credits | 8 or More Credits |
|-------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 20092010    | 36%                 | 17%              | 47%               |
| 20102011    | 31%                 | 20%              | 48%               |
| 20112012    | 24%                 | 20%              | 56%               |
| 20122013    | 28%                 | 19%              | 53%               |

Grade 11 Cohort Credit Accumulation

| School Year | 18.9 or Less Credits | 19 or 23.9 Credits | 24 or More Credits |
|-------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 20092010    | 51%                  | 23%                | 26%                |
| 20102011    | 42%                  | 26%                | 32%                |
| 20112012    | 35%                  | 33%                | 32%                |
| 20122013    | 36%                  | 33%                | 31%                |

Grade 10 Cohort Credit Accumulation

| School Year | 13.9 or Less Credits | 14 or 15.9 Credits | 16 or More Credits |
|-------------|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 20092010    | 49%                  | 18%                | 33%                |
| 20102011    | 43%                  | 20%                | 37%                |
| 20112012    | 42%                  | 18%                | 39%                |
| 20122013    | 36%                  | 20%                | 43%                |

## Summary of Cohort Credit Accumulation Trends

The percent of self-identified students achieving the expected number of credits in Grades 9 and 10 has increased over the past four years, but remains relatively unchanged in Grade 11.

There continues to be considerable room for improvement across all three years. Approximately one half of students are on track following Grade 9. Percentages decrease to approximately two fifths in Grade 10 and just under one third in Grade 11.

Table 13. Cohort credit accumulation.

## Graduation Rate

The Ministry of Education is in the process of establishing a methodology for calculating graduation rates, which can be applied across the Province. This standard methodology will allow for comparisons across Boards. When the methodology is released, TVDSB will calculate Board cohort rates as well as rates for students who self-identify as FNMI.

# Discussion



## Discussion

This report summarizes evidence of program implementation and outcomes related to programming for FNMI students and about FNMI histories, cultures, and perspectives. Information is drawn from a wide variety of sources including policies, reports, documents depicting processes, participant stories and feedback, achievement and attendance data, and key stakeholder perspectives.

What follows is a synthesis of this evidence augmented with additional ideas and suggestions shared by students, parents, community members, and staff during interviews and focus groups conducted to inform this review. Key themes and recommendations emerging from analyses of these diverse sources of information and stakeholder perspectives are grouped into five sections mirroring the overall organization of the report: collaborative relationships, system structures, partnerships, programs, lifelong learning, and programming outcomes. For discussion purposes, four programming outcome sections, (cultural connectedness, sense of belonging, student attendance, and student achievement) are collapsed into one category, the focus of which is on high level issues related to establishing measures and monitoring outcomes.

Below are five broad recommendations, one from each section. In the corresponding five sections overarching themes, based on data from “lived experience” (first-hand accounts of participants, based on their experiences), and additional “considerations” (ideas/suggestions drawn together for consideration) are presented. TVDSB will consult and collaborate with the FNMI community to develop these recommendations into an action plan.

## Recommendations:

### Collaborative Relationships :

Augment approaches for working together towards a common goal of improved outcomes for FNMI students, which are rooted in TVDSB’s Our Shared Vision guiding principles of mutual respect, sharing, trust, partnerships, and equity and inclusion.

**System Structures:** Enhance the organizational structure for FNMI programming and services to distribute leadership and expand opportunities for internal collaboration, coordination of programs and supports, as well as enhanced communication between the system and schools.

**Programs:** Work in collaboration with key stakeholders (i.e., students, parents, community members, staff) to develop, implement, and monitor a more wholistic and coordinated FNMI programming plan that is accessible to all students and makes explicit the links to future opportunities.

**Lifelong Learning:** Consult and collaborate with FNMI students, parents, community partners, and staff to develop, implement, and monitor a comprehensive strategy to increase cultural competency of all staff and students.

**Programming Outcomes:** Institute wholistic measures and approaches for evaluating and disseminating information about programming to focus on:  
(1) understanding the effectiveness of strategies/initiatives; (2) supporting evidence informed decision-making; and (3) increasing transparency.



## Collaborative Relationships

Collaboration helps to better understand the complex and interconnected ways education can support student success. Augmented approaches for working together towards a common goal of improved outcomes for FNMI students are needed. This approach can be rooted in TVDSB's Our Shared Vision guiding principles of mutual respect, sharing, trust, partnerships, and equity and inclusion.

## 1. Lived Experience

Students, parents, community members, and staff value opportunities to engage in meaningful shared decision-making.

### 1.1 Considerations

- a) Facilitate shared ownership and commitment to effecting change for FNMI students. Collaboratively re-vision structures to enable ongoing and joint decision-making, implementation, and monitoring.
- b) Explore opportunities to enhance communication within and across groups; for example:
  - ☀ broaden mandate and membership of the First Nations Advisory Committee to include representation of urban Aboriginal population; and
  - ☀ increase transparency by sharing ideas, concerns, and actions undertaken by the FNMI Student Advisory Council with First Nations Advisory Committee and vice versa.
- c) Create mechanisms for continuous feedback loops to enable students with diverse perspectives to share their experiences, aspirations, and ideas with staff, parents, and community members.

## 2. Lived Experience

Relationships built on respect and honesty are paramount to establishing trust and engagement.

### 2.1 Considerations

- a) Find additional ways to connect with students and parents in welcoming, inclusive, and caring ways. Encourage and support parents to be active participants in the education of their children.
- b) Encourage TVDSB staff to visit FNMI communities (e.g., meet parents, support transitions) and participate in community-based events.
- c) Document and share the process of consultations and collaborations to make these processes visible and valued.

## 3. Lived Experience

Honouring voice and agency are critical components in establishing trust, respect, and inclusion: "Aboriginal voices are sometimes silenced or not at the table for complex reasons. The omission, whether deliberate or not, needs to be brought to consciousness" (Interview, 2013).

### 3.1 Considerations

- a) Consult with community experts and relevant literature/research to identify and implement approaches for redressing power and privilege imbalances (e.g., sharing or talking circle approach).

# Discussion



## System Structures

Enhance the organizational structure for FNMI programming and services to distribute leadership. Distributed leadership is viewed as a positive conceptual frame that recognizes the situation or structure of leadership as integral. Distributing leadership increases interconnectivity and expands opportunities in ways that have a positive impact on internal collaboration, facilitate easier coordination of programs and supports, and increases communication between the system and schools.

## 4. Lived Experience

The breadth and scope of programming for FNMI students and about FNMI cultures, histories, and perspectives is vast.

### 4.1 Considerations

- a) Explore methods for enhancing dialogue between the system and schools related to FNMI programming (e.g., key contact people, utilize web-based communication).
- b) Encourage and support school access to resources in collaboration with the three local First Nations communities and FNMI organizations in and around their school community (e.g., Indigenous Education Coalition, N'Amérind Friendship Centre, Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre, First Nations Housing Co-Operative).
- c) Explicitly support FNMI students in sharing ceremonies and traditions with the system, their school, and classmates.

## 5. Lived Experience

Shared responsibility and succession planning are critical to ensuring key elements of FNMI programming (e.g., consultation, collaboration, communication) are sustainable and growth oriented as inevitable changes in staff occur.

## 5.1 Considerations

- a) Ensure FNMI programming is promoted and supported by all staff, including senior and school administration, learning support services staff, and school-based educators and support staff.
- b) Investigate alternative team configurations (e.g., Toronto District School Board model) or options for reorganizing current resources (e.g., create FNMI programming team which includes FNMI Education Advisor, FNMI Student Work Study Teacher, Native Languages and Studies teachers, First Nation Counsellors). An integrated team influences sustainable structures and mechanisms, augments a shared knowledge base, and promotes joint responsibility and ownership.

## 6. Lived Experience

Roles and responsibilities of the FNMI Education Advisor position are complex and multifaceted (e.g., cultural broker, relationship builder, liaison, spokesperson, educator, project manager).

### 6.1 Considerations

- a) Facilitate increased capacity of existing learning support services staff to deliver school and classroom-based professional learning.
- b) Continue to develop and implement strategies for equitable recruitment, selection, and promotion of staff (e.g., mandatory Bias Free Hiring Training). Ensure these strategies are transparent.

# Discussion



## Programs

Work in collaboration with key stakeholders (i.e., students, parents, community members, staff) to develop, implement, and monitor a more wholistic and coordinated FNMI programming plan. Successful collaboration strengthens relationships while encouraging dialogue about innovative solutions. Strengthening relationships among the broad group of stakeholders can generate a programming plan that is accessible to all students and makes explicit links to future opportunities.

## 7. Lived Experience

A number of programs and initiatives rely on annual grants from the Ministry. As a consequence, planning is often driven by Ministry of Education priority areas and funding formulae.

### 7.1 Considerations

- Utilize review framework from this report in conjunction with specific programs or school data, stakeholder input, and key reports (e.g., FNMI Student Voice, FNMI Attendance Sub-Committee, Summer Engagement Project, FNMI Student Advisory Council Recommendations) to identify priority areas that inform program selection/development, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation.
- Engage in proactive planning processes. Specifically, identify core priority and programming areas and include suggestions for enhancement or expansion of these programs/initiatives for when funding opportunities arise.
- Explore opportunities to partner with communities and organizations to exchange and/or share resources as well as services.

## 8. Lived Experience

Resource constraints, both in terms of expertise and budget, limit the availability of certain programs and services (e.g., Native Languages and Studies, culturally relevant programming, counselling support).

### 8.1 Considerations

- Investigate innovative methods to expand accessibility of existing programming through alternative forms of delivery (e.g., e-learning, satellite classrooms, teacher-guided work at home, webcasts).
- Invest resources into Native Languages to support revitalization and preservation of Aboriginal cultures. Where necessary, support certified teachers with developing language skills and support fluent speakers to be effective teachers.
- Actively recruit Native Languages teachers more widely throughout TVDSB region and Ontario.
- Provide greater access to counselling/mentoring supports. Ensure all counsellors have a thorough understanding of FNMI cultures.

## 9. Lived Experience

“Aboriginal people advocate a (w)holistic lifelong learning approach”, in which Aboriginal and Western knowledge is integrated (CCL, 2007), P.5).

### 9.1 Considerations

- Continue reflecting on programming and services to ensure FNMI students’ spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental needs are being met. For example, identify and implement strategies focused on:
  - raising student achievement;
  - fostering cultural pride and identity ;
  - enhancing sense of belonging; and
  - encouraging regular attendance.
- Ensure programming makes explicit the links with a range of future opportunities.
- Consult with FNMI communities, other School Boards, and the literature/research to identify strategies and programs with high success rates for FNMI students (e.g., hope and resiliency programs).
- Support schools in creating welcoming environments (e.g., resources in library, artwork in halls and classrooms, FNMI spaces welcoming to all staff and students) and curriculum reflective of diverse FNMI cultures, histories, and perspectives (e.g., *Two Paths, One Journey*).





## Lifelong Learning

Cultural competency has multiple components and dimensions. Ultimately it focuses on the ability to interact effectively with others in ways that honor and value diversity. In consultation and collaboration with FNMI students, parents, community partners, and staff, TVDSB will develop, implement, and monitor a comprehensive strategy to increase cultural competency of all staff and students.

## 10. Lived Experience

There is a continuum of knowledge, understanding, and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing.

### 10.1 Considerations

- a) Craft and implement a long term plan for professional learning that has multiple entry points and modalities to meet diverse learning needs. Continue to monitor, reflect, and revise as needs and aspirations evolve.
- b) Identify and provide access to a tool for self-assessing cultural competency to identify needs and measure changes in knowledge and understanding.

## 11. Lived Experience

Many staff and students are unaware of the complex issues that contribute to systemic barriers and ongoing mistrust in the provincial education system among some FNMI students and their families. In some cases, this lack of awareness and understanding leads to stereotyping, discrimination, and racism.

### 11.1 Considerations

- a) Identify key learning objectives to guide development of training and curriculum materials related to these issues (e.g., diversity of FNMI populations, local history, contemporary practices and approaches).
- b) Develop and implement mechanisms similar to those employed for mandatory Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), health and safety, and violence awareness training to reach all staff.

## 12. Lived Experience

Thames Valley DSB employs more than 7200 staff working in sites stretched across 7000 square kilometers.

### 12.1 Considerations

- a) Continue to develop the FNMI website and provide resources (e.g., curriculum, school and community-based supports) to stimulate learning and cultural sensitivity.
- b) Investigate cost effective, multimodal mechanisms to increase accessibility of professional learning opportunities. For example, investigate the use of technology to provide initial and ongoing learning, and to promote continuous dialogue.

# Discussion



## Programming Outcomes

Monitoring and measuring are critical components of responsive programming. Understanding the effectiveness of strategies or initiatives is essential to programming decisions and outcomes. Data and information about program effectiveness supports evidence informed decision-making. Evidence informed decision-making is best generated by wholistic measures and approaches for evaluating as well as disseminating information about programming. When findings and decisions are communicated to a range of stakeholders it increases understanding and transparency.

## 13. Lived Experience

Existing data sources and methods of collecting information are limited; specifically, the primary focus is achievement and methodologies for collection and analysis are mainly quantitative.

### 13.1 Considerations

a) Partner with FNMI organizations (e.g., Indigenous Education Coalition), the Ministry of Education, and post-secondary institutions to identify and, where necessary, develop additional methods and tools enabling more wholistic assessment of outcomes for students and staff (e.g., self-assessment tool for cultural competency, modified Early Development Index, cultural competency tool).

b) Consult with FNMI researchers/program evaluators and relevant literature to develop evaluation methods that are reflective and inclusive of Indigenous perspectives.

## 14. Lived Experience

Understanding the effectiveness and success of programming requires systematic planning prior to implementation (i.e., establishing desired outcomes, selection of evidence-informed strategies, and identifying/developing appropriate measures); as well as monitoring and reflection throughout.

## 14.1 Considerations

a) Establish mechanisms (e.g., logic modeling, action planning, concept mapping) for increasing coherence of programs or initiatives to focus on greater alignment with priorities developed at the local level via consultative and collaborative practices.

b) Institute processes and structures for ongoing collection of evidence aligned with desired outcomes to measure implementation and impact.

Implementation/formative data might include: documented anecdotes, emails, photographs/videos, website usage statistics. Impact/summative data might include: participant stories/reflection, validated/standardized assessment tools, questionnaires, observation logs/checklists.

c) Consider creating a 3-5 year rotating evaluation schedule to review specific programs/initiatives in greater depth.

## 15. Lived Experience

Disseminating information regarding program implementation and outcomes enhances communication and transparency and informs consultative and collaborative processes.

### 15.1 Considerations

a) Work with students, parents, community members, and staff to brainstorm, develop, and implement methods of communicating with diverse audiences in accessible and engaging ways.

b) Collaboratively develop a communication plan and mechanisms to share programming information with key stakeholders, while ensuring confidentiality of participants is maintained.

# Moving Forward



The purpose of this section is to report on the progress of the FNMI portfolio for the 2013-2014 school year. The FNMI programming review considers all portfolio activities up to June 2013. Therefore, the 2013-2014 school year is characterized as neither pre-review (captured in the review) nor part of the review considerations. It should be noted that FNMI Implementation Project Funding from the Ontario Ministry of Education was approved in December 2013. In anticipation of the funding, discussion and planning took place in the fall of 2013. Therefore these specific programs could not formally begin until early 2014.

## Programs and Initiatives

The table below outlines FNMI programs and initiatives for the 2013-2014 school year.

| Program/Initiative                            | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Elder(s) and Cultural Teacher(s) Programs     | <p>In the 2013-2014 school year the TVDSB continued to offer the Visiting Elder(s) and Cultural Teacher(s) (VECT) program, which makes Elders and Cultural Teachers accessible to schools on an as needed and by request basis.</p> <p>In 2014, the TVDSB will recommence its Elder(s) and Cultural Teacher(s) in Residence (ECTIR) Program, which provides schools with access to an Elder(s) and Cultural Teacher(s) for a sustained period of time. The program has been expanded from 6 to 10 (elementary, secondary and alternative) schools.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Curriculum                                    | In September 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Education released its new <b><i>Social Studies Grade 1 to 6, History and Geography Grades 7 and 8 and Grades 9 and 10 Canadian and World Studies: Grade 9 Geography, Grade 10 History, Grade 10 Civics (Politics) Curriculum</i></b> which have been enhanced with greater FNMI content.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| FNMI Student Work Study Teacher (SWST)        | In October 2013, a FNMI SWST was hired to improve FNMI student achievement by identifying challenges, liaising with the classroom teacher on instructional strategies, and providing classroom support. Currently, support is offered at Aberdeen, C.C. Carrothers, Ealing, Glen Cairn and Lorne Ave. The findings from this initiative will be compiled into a report for the Ontario Ministry of Education to help inform the Ministry on responding to FNMI student educational needs.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Resources                                     | <p>In December 2013, the TVDSB held an FNMI Open House for elementary teachers. During the event, information about FNMI programming was distributed, along with FNMI resources to enhance learning for all students. TVDSB has established a collection of resources with FNMI content for loan. In 2014 several FNMI resources will be distributed to schools.</p> <p>TVDSB's FNMI website is currently being updated, and will include access to further FNMI resources for students, parents, teachers and community members.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Transition, Mentoring and Leadership Programs | <p>In 2013-2014, TVDSB has engaged CAMH to assist with our transition, mentoring and leadership programs. In partnership with the CAMH, the fall Grade 8 FNMI Transition Conference was held, and voluntary follow up sessions with CAMH staff will commence in 2014. Collaborative planning of the Spring Grade 8 FNMI Transition Conference has begun. FNMI student mentors participated in a training session in early fall. Ongoing mentoring programs are currently running at some elementary and secondary schools. In 2014 the TVDSB will continue to facilitate its FNMI Student Advisory Council in partnership with CAMH.</p> <p>The Peer Leadership Program, initiated by Beal, will commence its second year in February 2014. The program pairs Grade 9 FNMI Student Leaders with 16 Grade 8 FNMI students from Ealing, Lorne Ave. and Aberdeen. The program supports leadership development of Grade 9 FNMI students, augments transition supports for Grade 8 students, and enhances student engagement.</p> |

# Moving Forward



| Program/Initiative                               | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Culture Camps                                    | In 2013-2014 the TVDSB will continue to run its Dare to Lead culture camp in partnership with CAMH.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| The Indigenous Arts Initiative                   | In 2014 the Indigenous Arts Initiative will be offered through the Beal art department. After attending a cultural competency workshop, art teachers will collaborate with history and geography teachers (who are implementing the new social science curriculum), as well as Indigenous artists to lead classes in Indigenous: dance, drama, drumming, ceramics, photography, printmaking and painting.                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Student Engagement/ Re-engagement                | For the 2013-14 school year the TVDSB has committed to continue dedicating a partial attendance counsellor caseload to keep FNMI students engaged in school. Funding for this position was supplemented through a Ministry of Education FNMI re-engagement grant targeted at re-engaging off-roll FNMI students.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative (MAEI)    | MAEI is a site-based mentoring program, which connects potential university-bound FNMI secondary students with Chartered Accountants to: 1) increase FNMI student graduation rates; 2) encourage FNMI students to enroll in post-secondary; and 3) support FNMI students in developing their career paths. MAEI is currently offered at two TVDSB secondary schools with high FNMI populations: Beal SS and Saunders SS.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program (AYEP) | The AYEPP is a partnership between MAEI and the Ontario Ministry of Education, which provides FNMI students in grades 11 and 12 with business course credits that focus on developing leadership and entrepreneurship. Students are mentored to develop business plans, and eligible students receive funding to develop a 'micro-business'. Research on the program has shown that the AYEPP helps develop entrepreneurship skills, and increases attendance, confidence, and motivation to pursue post-secondary education among FNMI students. In 2014 the program is being introduced at Beal SS. |

## Lifelong Learning

The table below outlines a number of FNMI cultural competency initiatives for the 2013-2014 school year.

| Lifelong Learning Activity        | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cultural Competency Presentations | <p>In November and December 2013 several cultural competency presentations to TVDSB staff members and all Western University teacher candidates have been provided.</p> <p>Presentations included information on: Canada's colonial context; ongoing trauma in the student population; the TVDSB's FNMI student demographic; programs and supports the TVDSB provides for FNMI students; and teaching across difference in an FNMI context.</p> |

# Moving Forward



| Lifelong Learning Activity                                                             | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| TVDSB visit to First Nation Communities                                                | <p>In December 2013, Trustee members of the TVDSB, Senior Administration, together with the principals of tuition agreement schools and other TVDSB staff members, participated in a visit to Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Munsee-Delaware Nation, and Oneida Nation of the Thames communities. The purpose of this visit was to enhance understanding of the communities' rich histories and cultures, as well as their concerns and hopes for the future.</p> <p>On December 16th, TVDSB participants reconvened for a debriefing session. The aim was to provide the participants with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and identify next steps. Research and Assessment provided an online survey to those who attended to collect their reflections on the visits, the session, and consider next steps.</p> <p>A blog, documenting the TVDSB visit to the communities will be released in January 2014. A second blog capturing the communities' perspectives and reflections will follow.</p> |
| FNMI Cultural Competency Learning Circle                                               | <p>In 2014 the TVDSB will implement a FNMI Cultural Competency Learning Circle to provide cultural competency training to TVDSB staff and students. Staff and students will bring this learning to their school communities. During a culminating year-end event, FNMI student participants will celebrate and share their projects with the community.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| FNMI Cultural Competency Resources                                                     | <p>In September 2013 TVDSB provided a resource entitled <i>Bridging Cultures: Indigenous and Scientific Ways of Knowing Nature</i> (secondary) to support teachers in including FNMI perspectives in teaching the sciences.</p> <p>The TVDSB is currently piloting a curriculum resource entitled <i>Two Paths, One Journey</i> (elementary). This resource is designed to support teachers in teaching FNMI content across the curriculum.</p> <p>In addition, the TVDSB has compiled a collection of resources to support the development of FNMI cultural competency in teachers.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Collaborative Inquiries:<br>Delaware Central, Lambeth, Wilfrid Jury, Woodland Heights. | <p>Four TVDSB elementary schools are currently engaged in a FNMI Collaborative Inquiry with three goals: 1) increased community engagement of First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners; 2) increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives for all staff and students; and 3) increased student achievement and self-confidence. A Native Language Teacher Collaborative Inquiry is also being developed.</p> <p>In 2014 a Secondary Literacy (OSSLT) Collaborative Inquiry aimed at improving FNMI student literacy results will take place in four secondary schools with high FNMI student populations. In addition, the TVDSB will facilitate a Student Success Teams Collaborative Inquiry. Student Success Teacher teams from four schools will collaboratively analyze school-based data, develop a plan, and evaluate and share results.</p>                                                                                                   |



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