



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

School Board: Rainy River District School Board

Contact Person and Email Address: Bob Kowal bob.kowal@mail.rrdsb.com or heather.campbell@mail.rrdsb.com

Name of Program/Initiative/Strategy: Outdoor Classroom

Hyperlinks to Documents or Website(s) Describing this Program/Initiative/Strategy

Description of Program/Initiative/Strategy

The focus is on practices that excite, engage and increase student confidence, achievement and well-being. In the brief description please provide answers to the following questions: Where the program/initiative/strategy is delivered (school/board locations)? Who is responsible for delivering and monitoring the program/initiative/strategy? Who is the target audience? Are there any community partnerships involved? Are there any staffing or budget implications? Are there any special resources required? What are your indicators of success, etc.?

Approximately, 38% of the students within the RRDSB self-identify as Indigenous. At Mine Centre School, the self-identification rate is 94.1%. Due to the high self-id rate, the School wanted to maximize the benefits of land based pedagogy for students.

Originally, an outdoor classroom space was created where students would go for “inspiration” for their learning. Mine Centre School is located within the Canadian Shield and its natural surrounding landscape provides a multitude of learning opportunities for students to explore their world. Through processes of inquiry, students engage in learning about wildlife, habitat, weather, water, cycles, etc. Furthermore, it leads to discussions regarding the original inhabitants of the area and the beliefs of the First Nation people regarding the role of the land.

There was an initial cost for materials/supplies for students but the costs were minimal. The classroom space was not manipulated in any manner in order to preserve the integrity of the learning environment. The classroom space is open to all students within the school and a “champion” is needed to ensure the space is used regularly.

What has been the impact on Student Learning?

There is a definite improvement with student engagement while learning in/about the outdoor classroom space. This engagement seems to be consistent throughout all grade levels.

Using an inquiry based approach, students are learning about the importance of the land for Indigenous people, how the Indigenous people managed the land and resources especially water, and challenges currently facing our Indigenous people.

Barbe Dennis, principal, of Mine Centre School notes: "that there is an increase in curiosity and student pride in the space. They are constantly looking for opportunities to share their space with others. Furthermore, we have always included local FN community members to enhance our learning, but the classroom provides more hands-on learning for the students. Since the K class has been involved with the space, there has not been a single behavioural referral from the group directed towards the office."

Due to the positive comments three other schools within the Board have implemented similar outdoor classrooms at their schools. One principal remarks "it allows us to use to maximize the use of our natural landscape and provides the students with hands-on learning opportunities."