



J.V. Clark School Review Report May 2015

J.V. Clark School Review
May 2015

School Principal: Silke Wissner

Date of Review: May 20-22, 2015

School Review Team:

Simon Blakesley, Director, Student Achievement and System Accountability
Bob Walker, School Council Liaison, Dept. of Education
Jason Seymour, Primary Teacher, Selkirk Elementary School
Pat Joe, First Nations Curriculum Integration Teacher, Individual Learning Centre

Meetings with the School included:

Students
Teachers
Para-professional staff
School Administration
School Council Chairperson

School Context

J. V. Clark School is located in Mayo, Yukon. J. V. Clark School was built in 2001. It is a rather modern facility that has a full-sized gym, kitchen spaces, a welcoming entrance, and adjoining Yukon College campus. The building has been well maintained and is in good condition. The enrollment for the 2014/2015 school year is 55 pupils.

Since the last review, the school has undergone significant changes in personnel, for a variety of reasons. Being a small school, this has made it difficult to maintain stability over the past three years. The 2014-15 school year, by all accounts, has appeared to have gone more smoothly given few changes and a staff that is diverse and dedicated to the school and its students.

Mayo is home to the First Nation of Na–Cho Nyak Dun (FNNND) where Northern Tutchone is spoken. The Community Education Liaison Coordinator (CELC) has an office near the school's administration area next to the staff room. J.V. Clark School strives for improving relationships and partnerships with agencies in Mayo, building partnerships with Yukon College Campus and FNNND to provide programming and opportunities for students.

J.V. Clark School provides primary, intermediate and secondary programming. Students attend from Kindergarten (4 and 5 year olds) all the way through to Graduation in grade 12. The school supports students with a wide range of needs from an educational as well as a social, personal and cultural perspective.

Norms and Culture:

Characteristics:

Continuously improving schools are socially and culturally inclusive with high expectations for each learner. A focus on continuous improvement is evident.

Observations of the Team:

- The open architecture and abundant student work displayed in the school contribute to an atmosphere that is both welcoming and exciting. First Nations culture and history is present in the front foyer and is distributed throughout the school in the form of heritage fair projects, photographs, carving, beading, and art
- The Team observed that the staff works flexibly and collaboratively in support of learning. For example, experienced staff members welcome ideas and suggestions from new staff who bring innovative approaches and expertise to the team. The majority of the staff feel that there is both informal and formal collaboration at J.V. Clark School
- Some staff shared with the Team that they feel the principal is very open to new ideas and will generate collaborative approaches to problem-solving. There is a willingness on the part of the staff to try new initiatives and adapt approaches already attempted even if they have not been welcomed or successful the first time
- Review Team members commented numerous times that they observed a very calm, orderly, and relaxing atmosphere at J.V. Clark School. This feeling is also commented on by other visitors to the school. The abundant student artwork, First Nations cultural representations, and the beautiful architecture of the school contribute to this atmosphere
- Related to the above, the Team heard from experienced staff members that the 14-15 school year has been more stable than in previous years, given less staff turnover due to unexpected events
- The small size of the school is viewed by staff primarily as a strength rather than a limitation: there is a family-feel to the school where everyone knows one another and offers support where needed. The ability to offer one-on-one assistance is viewed as a positive attribute of the school by both staff and students
- Related to the above point, the team did hear from some staff who feel that a greater linkage between Primary/Intermediate and Secondary levels would be beneficial in connecting all grade-levels from K-12 together
- The Team was highly impressed by the open, empathetic, and thoughtful nature of the senior high students it met with. These students shared many positive aspects of their school, while also identifying areas of concern for them. For example, these students commented that there appears to be bullying, tobacco, and substance abuse at the upper-intermediate grade level that is inconsistent with the family-friendly culture of the school

- J.V. Clark is a busy school with many events and activities taking place: for a small school of 52 students (K-12) the Team was impressed to hear that diverse programming is offered and students graduate each year. The Team also heard from high school students that they felt that they had very good teachers who are positive role models, and that there was a good connection between students and teachers
- High school students believe that the Grade 10 Residential School curriculum will be a positive addition for the understanding of First Nations historical perspectives and the negative effects of this cultural dislocation. In support of cultural teachings, high school students would like more on the land experiences and more experiential and engaging First Nations language-learning opportunities
- The Team felt that, for all the successes of J.V. Clark School, there may be the tendency of staff to be overly critical of their work and perhaps lose sight of their many positive gains. Taking time to identify and celebrate successes is an important way to recognize and gauge progress

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Ensure that adequate time is taken to identify and celebrate successes and the accomplishments of students on a regular basis in order to recognize the strengths of J.V. Clark School
- Seek ways to connect the two main wings of the school (primary/intermediate and high school) to foster collaboration between students and teachers across the K-12 continuum
- Work with parents, community, J.V. Clark School Council and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun (FNNND) to identify ways to promote the importance of success at school with respect to health, well-being, and future life-choices
- Reassess school-wide activities such as “buddy reading” and other activities, along with their importance, as ways to connect the high school to the intermediate and elementary levels to each other
- Related to the above, continue to promote opportunities for collaboration that all staff members can share and engage with
- Work to identify and develop more experiential, on-the-land activities, in order to further expand and embed into the school curriculum integrated opportunities for students to learn more of Northern Tutchone language and culture. Work with the Department and NND to create the partnerships necessary to embed on the land experiences into the curriculum. Exploring Robert Service and Chief Zzeh Gittlit Schools’ models may be helpful

School and Community

Characteristics: In continuously improving schools build a shared commitment to success for each learner. The school collaborates with parents, students, school council, First Nations and community to support student learning. Ongoing parent/community involvement is embedded in school culture and the school communicates about progress and challenges in multiple ways.

Observations of the Team:

- The school makes numerous attempts to reach out to the community: for example, parents are individually phoned by the principal for parent/student/teacher conferences. As a result, there is good turnout at conference times, and frequent visits by individual parents to classrooms during the school day. This was noted by staff as a strength, though seems to diminish as students moved beyond the primary grades
- With respect to communicating more broadly with the community, challenges appear to exist with consistently getting news out through paper, mail-outs, or emails. A related challenge may also exist with respect to the extent which paper/mailed communications are read
- The Team heard that it appears that the relationship between the school and some parts of the community could be stronger than it currently is. The prevailing sentiment shared with the Team was that, while there are supporters of the school in the community, the lack of a broader base of community support hinders the school and community from working together as closely and effectively as could be possible
- The Team heard from numerous participants that student attendance and absenteeism at school of great concern. While there are many students who attend most days, there is a group of students who are chronically absent for lengthy periods of time. This is complicated by distances, given that a trip to Whitehorse may result in a three-day absence
- Further to the above point, the Team heard from some teachers that some of their students tell them that school attendance and school-based education is of low priority for them or their family, and that educational attainment is of low importance to achieving their life or career goals. The Team heard from staff this is a concern for them, and that they are seeking ways to foster the intrinsic motivation of students to be engaged learners at school
- In order to support good attendance at school, there are financial awards given for the best attendance and most improved attendance. To encourage good attendance, an anonymous community member donates \$1000 each year in support of this goal. Small-group work and assistance is also utilized to personalize learning, and a counselling position is hoped to be in place in the 15-16 year to support good attendance

- There are after-school sports (badminton, circuit training) that parents can attend with their children, and evening tutoring offered by teachers at J.V. Clark School. The evening tutoring program offered at the senior level is well-subscribed in the times before report cards and exams
- The Team met with one of the six School Council members during the review. This member identified that, more recently, communication has improved between the school, the Council, and the community. Further, the observation was shared that the school is now more community-orientated than in previous years
- There is teacher involvement in the community and a desire on the part of staff to contribute: there are a number of long-serving staff members who take part in community events and are members of community organizations. These staff members know their students, their families, and the community well
- The Team heard from all with whom it met of the clear desire for there to be an increased presence of Elders in the school. All stakeholders expressed that this was an area requiring attention, but nonetheless Elders are currently not present in a consistent, visible, and meaningful way to support students in their growth
- Related to culture, the Team heard that there is a strong desire on the part of staff to integrate more deeply local First Nations language culture into the school. This said, it is a challenge to get local resource people who are knowledgeable with local cultural practices to visit the school. When First Nations cultural presenters or facilitators do visit the school, they may have come from outside the community. As a result, their efforts may not be reflective of local traditions and practices

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Working with NND, School Council, the Superintendent of Schools (Area 3) and First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit at the Yukon Department of Education, meet to identify together the structural/functional barriers to having Elders in the school and work in a solution-focused manner to address these barriers
- In order to have one or more Elders consistently in the school, consider exploring other models such as the Resident Elder model employed at Teslin School for nearly 20 years as a means of learning more about successful models of Elder-inclusion
- Continue to support ways in which First Nations language and culture is embedded widely throughout the curriculum to avoid these aspects being viewed as school subjects or crafts rather than a way of life and living

- Supporting active participation of the School Council on the School Growth Planning team as a means of fostering greater Council involvement in the school and its future directions would be mutually beneficial to the school and its community
- Consider re-instituting taking students up to the First Nation of Na–Cho Nyak Dun (FNNND) government house for history fairs, Halloween, and other events to share the work of students with parents and community and foster positive relationships
- Continue to work to bring awareness of the importance of education to the life-opportunities of students, and the relationship between good attendance and academic achievement at school

School Organization

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools organize structures, actions, and interventions to ensure success for each learner. Work in the school is coherent and aligned to focus on improvement. Actions and interventions include effectively differentiating resources, time and professional development to get results. The Department supports the school and makes connections across the Territory to build capacity.

Observations of the Team:

- The Team observed and heard of the scheduling efforts undertaken to create many hands-on opportunities for students, not only at the high school-level but also for intermediate students. For example, there is an Applied Skills rotation (grades 1-9) with Food/Industrial Education/Destination Imagination components, and there is an Art Technology course planned for next year
- In support of the above, the Industrial Education classroom is well-supplied and equipped with new or updated tools, and is well-utilized by many students at an age-appropriate level. Students shared that they enjoy their time in the shop and would like to be in there more often
- The Team heard that a prior concern of staff was the lower levels of participation in PE. As a result, the staff evaluated this situation and, with student engagement, designed a workshop-based system (Grades 7-12) whereby students rotate through a number of sports and activities. Feedback from students is that they appreciate this model and that it works well for them
- In order to promote physical activity and reinforce positive relationships, teachers organize staff/student games and sports events (dodgeball, badminton, etc.). Students enjoy these activities and would appreciate even more team sports

- The Team heard that a student leadership group is being considered once again for the 15-16 year as there appears there will be enough engaged students in the higher grades
- A flexible and adaptive approach is applied to the curricular offerings of students: for example, science and humanities are being merged at the high school level as is Industrial Education and Art. Option courses are not offered against each other, thus students can take both courses rather than one or the other
- Related to the above, based on student interest, high school Biology is being offered at J.V. Clark School. To facilitate this, a high school teacher (without specific Biology specialization training) prepared and ordered resources to deliver the course in an interesting and engaging way for students (e.g. the Bug Trap Project, crickets for food)
- High school students noted that, at times, their textbook/resource materials may be out of date or a previous edition relative to what might be being offered in an online course. This can make it challenging to follow courses and be prepared for assignments
- Related to the above, high school students also shared their frustration with the use of YouTube with Moodle courses. Many videos are blocked due to YESNET security/safety controls that they may not be able to override before the end of the class, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of this teaching method
- Staff shared with the Team that the principal is adept at capitalizing on the strengths of the staff and creatively solving problems as they arise. With respect to the strengths of staff, the Team observed that there is a strong balance of new, creative staff with diverse experiences combined with a core of veteran staff members who have extensive corporate knowledge of the school and community
- The Team heard that there appears ambiguity on the part of students, families, and some teachers regarding what the required elements of the BC Graduation program are. As a result, some parents are not as aware as they could be regarding whether their children are on the path to graduation

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Ensure that the BC graduation program is communicated and explained to parents, School Council students, and teachers in order that there is common understanding regarding what is required to graduate with a BC Dogwood Diploma. This can be done in an ongoing way through regular presentations and mailouts during the school year. A graduation bulletin board may also be an in-school communication strategy
- Continue to explore ways of expanding course offerings for students (e.g. blended learning)

- Continue to seek ways to expand team-sport activity for students in sports that are of interest to them
- Work with the Department of Education to address login/access concerns with YouTube, and to ensure that text resources are up-to-date and align with online resources

School Processes and Progress

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools take responsibility for improving outcomes for students. They use evidence to guide decisions and actions and have processes in place to collectively monitor progress and make adjustments in key areas of their work. They demonstrate improvement over time – for individual students, groups of students, and the school.

Observations of the Team:

- It was clear to the Team that the principal and staff members at J.V. Clark School know their students, their educational levels and needs, and use data to track their progress and attendance at school. For example, school-generated data was shared with the Team during review meetings. As a result, the individualization of programming for students is seen as a strength
- Decisions made at J.V. Clark School are supported by data (where possible) and evidence, and staff members collaborate through school-based professional learning. For example, the Team heard that three book studies focusing on reading were undertaken by staff last year
- The Team heard that the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model is not necessarily referred to by this name, but that collaboration does occur formally, informally, and at staff meetings. The small student population at J.V. Clark School and staff knowledge of the students makes collaboration quite straightforward
- In the 14-15 school-year, a defined Learning Assistance program of procedures and assessments has been implemented. To support this, the Pyramid of Intervention and School Based Team referral process is clearly displayed as a large process flow chart in the staff room. This flow chart identifies social, behavioural, and academic concerns along with steps on how to bring any concerns to School Based Team for review
- School staff and administration identified the need for a school-wide assessment for math, such as those used for literacy, to help better assess students' proficiency in math and adjust instruction and resources accordingly
- Students shared with the team that they feel supported by teachers in their learning, and get help when they need it. They appreciate the small class sizes and the individualized academic supports that they receive

- In order to meet more of the needs of students, the school is exploring the development of some form of Rural Experiential Model (REM) that could take place at J.V. Clark School in the future
- To better understand and assess the effectiveness of the workshop-based PE format implemented from grades 7-12, all students are now assessed on personal development and team involvements using rubrics shared by a Whitehorse high school
- With respect to student progress, School Council would appreciate learning more about the IEP process and how files are followed up. School Council would also like to learn more about the BC Graduation program

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue to use data and evidence to understand student progress in meaningful and appropriate ways, given that very small cohort sizes at J.V. Clark School present challenges to the use and reporting of numerical data
- Related to the above, continue the use of data to inform the work already being done to improve literacy and reading skills and abilities (response, analysis, and critical thinking)
- Share and review with the School Council the Pyramid of Intervention model and the School-Based Team (SBT) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) process in order to raise awareness and understanding of the processes used to support student learning
- Explore ways to support collaboration that promotes a stronger instructional/curricular connection between the elementary and secondary wings of the school to build a greater linkage throughout the K-12 continuum
- Explore the possibilities of a REM model that would fit the size of J.V. Clark School and give opportunities for students to show leadership as they host students from other rural communities

In conclusion

The review team members appreciated the hospitality shown them, along with the calm atmosphere and family-feel that it clearly experienced at J.V. Clark School. It was evident to the Team that the staff are collegial, with the desire to grow and expand how they work together and with their community for all students at J.V. Clark School. There now appears to be greater stability and a staff that is positioned to move the school forward. It must be noted once again how impressed the Team was by the students, who were engaged, observant, caring, and empathetic participants in this review.

At the end of the review, the Team identified what it believes to be complex challenges that stand as impediments to potential future growth. These are perhaps best framed as questions:

- 1) How can greater support for J.V. Clark School by the broader community and First Nation continue to be promoted and improved?
- 2) How can the value placed on K-12 education, its importance to increasing the life-choices of students and their ability to contribute to their community and society as citizens, be increased?

Resolving these two questions and acting upon the answers will be foundational to increasing the success of all students at J.V. Clark School. Therefore, the Review Team is hopeful that by surfacing these questions, this report will promote conversations leading to unified school and community-based planning and collaborative solutions that will benefit all students in the years ahead.

Practices to share:

- The highly effective, innovative “workshop” approach taken to deliver PE and other experiential activities could be of interest to other rural schools with small populations
- The innovative combination of subjects such as Art and Industrial Education, and other subjects, as ways to expand what can be offered to students

Recommendations to the Department

- Reconsider the access to YouTube in order that students can more easily access them when engaging in Moodle courses
- Support School Councils with on-going training on roles, responsibilities, and policy development
- Assist the school in ensuring that students have access to the most up-to-date course materials to support their learning through Blended Learning and Moodle