



**St. Elias Community School  
Review Report  
April 2016**

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St. Elias Community School Review  
April 2016

**School Principal:** Maggie Mann, Brian Eleniak (VP)

**Date of Review:** April 5/6, 2016

**School Review Team:**

Simon Blakesley, Director, Student Achievement/System Accountability, Yukon Education  
Greg Storey, Superintendent (Area 1), Yukon Education  
Robin Smarch, Senior Education Support Worker, Teslin Tlingit Council  
Paul MacDonald, PE teacher, Porter Creek Secondary School  
Shari Worsfold, Primary Curriculum Consultant, Yukon Education

**Meetings with the School included:**

- Students
- Teachers and support staff
- School Council members
- School administration

**School Context**

St. Elias School (SECS) is a K-12 community school in the stable and supportive community of Haines Junction, Yukon. The school serves approximately 129 students, of whom approximately half are of aboriginal ancestry, with the majority being citizens of Champagne and Aishihik First Nation (CAFN).

**SECS is the acronym for Supporting Everyone's Continued Success.** This defines the school's vision for all students, and high expectations for positive, student centered learning that is culturally reflective is based on the school's core values. Varied academic and extra-curricular opportunities Kindergarten through Grade 12 are offered. For example, Blended Learning is in its second year at the high school level.

The school staff is committed to supporting students to be positive, confident, contributing and self-sufficient members of the school, community and society. The school's strengths and history of strong programming enhance student success; students also assess and take an active role of their own learning and a variety of opportunities and interventions to support student success are provided.

SECS fosters a safe, respectful, caring climate that promotes a positive professional culture and creates meaningful relationships with students, parents, and community. SECS staff values

working collaboratively with all stake-holders and partners. School Council, Champagne and Aishihik First Nation (CAFN), parents and community members support the on-going development and successful learning environment offered at St. Elias Community School.

SECS values the connection shared with the CAFN and is grateful for the Education Support Worker in the school, financial and in-kind contributions to Elders in the School initiatives, the CAFN / St. Elias Community School Bi-Cultural Language program as well as cultural and experiential activities. Bringing real integration of Champagne and Aishihik First Nation and other Yukon First Nations learning and culture in our daily life at SECS is an ongoing goal.

St. Elias School Council is also very supportive of the school programming, initiatives and the efforts to improve achievement of students. An active and supportive parent community is dedicated in their support of student learning and school achievement.

## **Norms and Culture:**

### **Characteristics:**

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

### **Observations of the Team:**

- The team observed a warm, friendly, and caring atmosphere with a “family-feeling” at SECS. Students across age groups interact respectfully with each other in the hallways, on the playground, and during school and extracurricular activities. Teachers genuinely care about their students’ academic and social-emotional well-being
- There is a clearly identifiable student ownership of the school: the displays of student projects spanning multiple years, the long history of graduating class photos, and many graduation tiles in the ceilings are evidence of the pride that students feel for their school
- Individual differences are recognized and embraced at SECS. Since the last review, gender-neutral washrooms have been created for students and an LGBT bulletin board display presents an informative history and demystification of gender differences
- A highly supportive staff culture continues to exist at SECS. Staff shared how they help each other and work collaboratively together. Additionally, school staff expressed that they felt highly supported by a responsive school administration team and Yukon Education colleagues

- The team heard that there is a strong, supportive, and collaborative relationship between the school and CAFN. The school is very excited to have a new Education Support Worker who has just joined the school in 2016
- With respect to language and culture, multiple approaches serve to promote and reinforce language acquisition and cultural identity throughout the curriculum. For example, student work is clearly displayed throughout the school, Southern Tutchone art and symbols are evident, and whole-school events (such as the celebration of Aboriginal Languages Day and the Heritage Fair) bring school and community together to celebrate Haines Junction's First Nations heritage in powerful ways
- In relation to the above, the team also heard that there is the desire to further enhance the inclusion and incorporation of First Nations language and culture throughout student learning at SECS. Cultural collaboration with other schools has been occurring and the desire is to increase this. A challenge exists in that there is a continued loss of Elders to the community, and that an experienced Education Support Worker has retired
- The team was left with a clear sense that SECS students understand themselves as learners. The students with whom the team met were very polite, articulate, thoughtful, engaged, and self-aware. Students readily reflected upon, spoke about, and offered ideas and suggestions on how learning can be further enhanced at SECS

### **Recommendations for moving forward:**

- Continue the work already in progress to further strengthen the integration of Southern Tutchone language and culture at SECS. The review team believes that can be realized through:
  - Increased opportunities for on-the-land learning activities
  - An articulation of a continuum of outdoor, place-based, and on-the-land activities from primary to high school levels
  - Continuing the efforts to have Elders in the school on a consistent basis, perhaps through an ongoing Elder in the School program
  - Continuing to increase/expand the Southern Tutchone bi-cultural program
- Continue the very positive, conscious efforts to recognize, accept, and nurture individual differences at SECS
- Continue to nurture an environment where the atmosphere of the school and the programs offered to students make them want to stay and return to should they pursue a program elsewhere

- Continue to maintain and reinforce the family-feel of the school, the multi-age play and cooperation amongst students, and the caring and nurturing relationships that staff have with students at SECS

## **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:**

- Since the last review, SECS has worked collaboratively with School Council, the community, and CAFN to focus on improving student attendance. Over the past 3 years work has been conducted using an Attendance Initiative grant to examine factors that affect good school attendance.
- Related to the above, the team heard that absenteeism and lates continue to be of concern to staff. In fall 2016 a series of action items arising from the Attendance Initiative will be implemented: for example, the team heard from School Council that this will include the distribution of an “attendance kit” to students
- A breakfast and lunch program has been instituted since the 2013 review. Breakfast is run by the School Council, which applies for funding. A hot breakfast is offered each Friday. The team heard that this has served to improve attendance for some students who wish to come to school for breakfast who otherwise may not have
- SECS and Haines Junction community agencies work well together on matters of shared importance. For example, the team heard that, as a result of a concern regarding youth behaviour at community events, the school and various community stakeholders (parents, teachers, CAFN, Minor Hockey, the Village of Haines Junction, RCMP) are working together to develop and communicate a set of shared behavioural expectations and a code of conduct
- In reference to the above, SECS takes on a leadership role in the community. For example, Barbara Coloroso (an internationally recognized teacher, behaviour, and self-discipline consultant) was invited to work together with the school and community in a solution-focused manner

- The team heard from school staff that community businesses readily contribute resources in order to support student programming and learning activities at SECS. Examples include donations of food to school meal programs, shop supplies, and firewood for outdoor on-the-land activities
- The team heard from both staff and students that there is a positive “comfort-level” and affinity in regards to working and learning together. For example, teachers readily commented that they have things they learn from their students and their families. Students also shared that they can interact with teachers as community members outside of the school, and do not fear that their teachers will be leaving after a year or two in the community
- Many community events are held in the desire to maintain the close relationship between the school and the community. These include community barbecues, bison hunts and feasts, heritage fairs (showcasing community and family members) and Easter Egg hunts
- The team also heard that, in alignment with the community school philosophy, the school is open for use for many other non-school related events

### **Recommendations for moving forward:**

- Continue the work being done collectively by the school, School Council, and community allies to identify barriers to attendance and support families and students in the effort to reduce student absenteeism at SECS
- Continue the work being done to implement PBIS (Positive Behavioral and Intervention Supports) in a systematic way throughout the school
- As a community school, continue to take on the leadership role already embedded as a means to foster relationships focused on continued student success
- Continue the ongoing efforts to both broaden and deepen the supportive working relationship with CAFN, and with other allied community agencies and groups

## **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:**

- It was clearly evident to the team that the recommendations made in the 2013 review have been thoughtfully considered and acted upon. Specifically, at the high school level staff and administration have worked with their high school cohort to create a greater high school presence and identity at SECS. This was clearly evident to the review team
- In relation to the above, and in response to the 2013 review the team noted the following:
  - The creation of a space in the school that high school student can call their own
  - The development of a student leadership council that is active and positive (and could include more First Nations student engagement)
  - A teacher dedicated to supporting high school activities, and activities specifically geared to them using Skills Canada
  - Meaningful activities for the student leadership council to engage in to show leadership that benefits all students (e.g. a high school field day)
  - The introduction of Blended Learning and the Moodle platform as a means to offer greater depth and breadth to high school programming
- At the high school level, staff have engaged in PD to implement a Blended Learning approach to program delivery employing the Moodle platform. While there are aspects of this delivery method that require ongoing, continuous refinement, the team heard from staff, administration, and students that this model has been a very positive and flexible addition to the school. The team heard the following benefits:
  - Allows students to work independently and work ahead when they finish a course
  - Allows students who are behind to catch up
  - Supports adult students who return to complete their studies
  - Provides the ability to offer a variety of programs and courses
  - Permits a more flexible timetable
  - Creates the opportunity for teachers to write their own courses and tailor learning to individual student needs and interests
  - Offers solid future potential for what can be offered at a rural high school
- With respect to expanding learning opportunities for students, the team noted that the successful music programming has been extended down to the primary and intermediate levels as staffing levels have permitted. This includes primary and intermediate students

learning how to play string instruments such as the ukulele and learn the skills necessary to perform in public

- Students have many extracurricular opportunities to engage in at SECS. The team was impressed with how the staff organize and schedule to eliminate overlap of activities. The benefits are that there is not ‘competition’ for students and that students do not have to choose one activity over another due to scheduling conflicts
- With respect to organization that includes First Nations language and culture being interwoven into instruction, the principal directs staff to incorporate language and culture into their long range plans. These plans are reviewed at the beginning of each school year. The team heard that this has been a successful approach
- The team heard from staff that graduating students could benefit from increased counselling support specifically focused on helping them with the transition from high school to post-secondary and the world of work. This was an area some staff felt that there had been a decrease in what SECS was able to offer students since the last review
- Staff shared with the team that greater clarity, planning, and PD would be helpful with respect to the overall deployment of EAs. A suggestion included PD or collaboration time, particularly at the start of the school year, for teachers and EAs to plan and coordinate, and training and/or professional development for EAs to further develop their skillsets
- In order to promote literacy acquisition, Reading Recovery™ is implemented in Grade 1 and delivered by the Reading Recovery/Learning Assistance teacher as a means to support students in acquiring foundational literacy skills and processes in early reading and writing
- Related to the above, a concern presented to the team was the deployment of Learning Assistance. The team noted frustration with respect to the workload, level of ‘paperwork’ and the allocated time for Learning Assistant teachers to support learners at across all grade levels
- The ability to know their teaching assignment prior to the end of the school year would help teachers to better prepare in advance of the next school year
- The team observed that there has been improvement in the Industrial Arts space in terms of equipment and flooring, but wondered about the provision of adequate maintenance for shop equipment
- Staff shared with the team that they appreciate the dedicated organizational efforts of the administration team and the school’s administrative assistant



## **Recommendations for moving forward:**

- Continue the excellent efforts already underway to promote high school leadership, and the fostering of a high school identity with thought given to ensure that the leadership team is representative of the student population
- Continue to fine-tune the delivery of Blended Learning and the use of the Moodle platform, using a process of conversation with staff and students to take stock of strengths and make adjustments as needed to continue the positive momentum
- Continue to communicate Blended Learning and Moodle to parents to increase their understanding of this new pedagogical approach works, and its benefits
- Review the use and deployment of EAs with teachers and para-professional staff in order to identify concerns, discuss and develop potential possible solutions, and identify training and ways to increase effectiveness
- Work with Department consultants and the superintendent to review the frequency of maintenance and upkeep of shop equipment

## **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:**

- When discussing teaching and learning with staff, it was clearly evident to the team that staff know where their students are academically, particularly at the primary level. With respect to sharing achievements with parents, student-led conferences have 100% attendance
- The team heard from staff and administration that they are aware that math is a challenge for students (particularly in the older grades, but also across many levels) and that they are exploring ways to analyze and take action to help improve math outcomes for all students
- In order to improve assessment practices with respect to Assessment for Learning, staff have worked with Sandra Herbst to professionally develop and increase the knowledge of and commitment to assessment for learning

- With respect to school growth planning and the growth-goal focus on reading using Adrienne Gear as a framework (and in particular non-fiction reading) the team heard how the activities of teachers at multiple grade levels has been adjusted to ensure that non-fiction reading development is integrated across grade levels and subject areas such as Science, Social Studies, Foods, and Industrial Education
- In reference to school growth and the non-fiction reading focus, the team heard clearly from the staff that this is a goal requiring further work and attention in order to ensure that goals are achieved. A dedicated effort is being made at SECS to foster and maintain a shared vision of reading comprehension and literacy development
- In order to promote exploratory and inquiry-based learning, some students are engaged in “Genius Hour”, developed by Google™ as a means to explore their passions as they concurrently develop research and presentation skills
- The team met with two members of the SECS School Council. The team was very impressed with their appreciation of the school, staff, and the efforts made to enhance learning for all students. The Council is very supportive of the school and values the open, genuine, and collaborative relationship that exists with school administration and staff
- In conversation with the Council the team perceived that that there was some vagueness with respect to the School Council’s broader awareness of student progress across the K-12 continuum and of school growth planning as an integrated, longer-term process

### **Recommendations for moving forward:**

- If not already done, share with School Council on a regular basis a synopsis of student assessment data (to ensure confidentiality) as a means of informing School Council on student progress at SECS, engaging in discussions around learning, and broadening the awareness of student assessment practices
- Continue the work already being done to utilize Adrienne Gear’s resources as a means to improving the literacy strategies of teachers to teach reading comprehension. In a related way, continue the use of assessment for learning strategies (Sandra Herbst) and department consultant expertise to support and inform this work
- Continue the positive efforts already under way as a staff to support a common language of assessment for learning, and to create meaningful work/assessment samples and reporting throughout all grade levels
- As a staff, give thought to the ways in which students who would benefit from being challenged academically are enriched and supported to extend their learning

## **In conclusion**

The review team thoroughly enjoyed its visit to St. Elias Community School. In particular, the team enjoyed the pleasant, thoughtful, engaged, and respectful students with whom they talked and learned from. The positive tone, welcoming atmosphere, and thoughtful and caring learning environment which spans the K-12 continuum at SECS was clearly evident and appreciated. The dedicated efforts of the staff, community, parents, First Nation, and allied support agencies clearly interconnect in ways that help SECS students to thrive.

Based on the reflections and contributions of review participants, the team is confident that SECS will continue to analyse, reflect, take risks, and try new initiatives, while concurrently working to maintain and grow the structures and relationships already in place to support students to achieve success in school and in their lives.

### **Practices to share:**

- the efforts to help support the creation of a positive high school identity in a rural K-12 school
- the creation of a “whole-school” family atmosphere that supports multi-age play, interaction, mentorship, and care for others
- the positive relationship between the school and community allies that supports working together
- the extension of a successful high school music program to the primary and intermediate grades
- The requirement for teachers to embed First Nations language and culture across subjects in their long range plans
- The piloting of “Genius Hour”

### **Suggestions for Yukon Education**

- Review the provision of Learning Assistance at SECS to ensure that resources are adequate to meet demand
- Review the maintenance and upkeep of Industrial Education equipment to ensure longevity and safety
- Consider staffing that allows for music programming to be offered on a regular basis across primary and intermediate levels