



Del Van Gorder Review Report

Del Van Gorder

Date: November 2011

School Principal: Wes Malo

Date of Review: November 3 to 5

School Review Team:

Kevin Foley Principal, Tantalus

Penny Prysruk, Superintendent, Area 2

Judy Arnold, Director, DOE

Meetings with the School included:

- The School Growth Planning Team
- Staff
- Meeting with students in classrooms and at the Kettle Café
- Meeting with School Council and parent representatives
- Classroom visits

School Context

Del Van Gorder School is located in Faro, Yukon. The school is large well-maintained K-12 facility that has the capacity to serve a student population of over 400. The current student population is 39. The school plays a vital role in the community. There is a high level of expectation by the community to provide a broad range of both curricular and extra curricular programming at the school, as well as to have students reach standards of academic excellence. The school is viewed as a community resource that not only provides a high level of academic and social programming for the community's youth, but as a central meeting place for community events and activity. School events that promote community involvement include: music and drama presentations, community barbeques, student achievement events, the annual Christmas concert, and a student created and run coffee house. The school also houses Yukon College Campus and the Public Library. A new principal began work in the school in September of 2011.

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 school is spacious, clean and tidy and the atmosphere is relaxed and child-centered,
 - The hallways contain colourful displays and examples of student work;
- Staff are diverse, energetic, student and learning-focused and proud of the school;
- Students appeared to be comfortable in the school and were welcoming and well mannered,
 - Students take on leadership roles at the school including managing the Kettle Café and older students have opportunities to interact with and support younger students;
- There is a focus on social responsibility and student independence. Staff supports students in dealing with issues and conflicts in respectful ways;
- Given the size of the school and the number of students there is the potential for the students to feel somewhat disconnected from each other;
- School Council was concerned about the long term viability of the school particularly at the secondary level.
- Although there is an interest in professional development at the school, the Team did not get a sense of urgency in relation to improving outcomes for each student, those not yet meeting expectation or those capable of fully meeting and exceeding expectations;

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Find ways for the students and staff to come together as a learning community to enhance school spirit,
 - If scheduled creatively this may provide a way to build some staff collaboration time into the schedule;
- Collaboratively review the performance of all of the students at the school and focus on high expectations and continuous improvement for each learner.
- Given that the student population may remain small, explore creative ways to maximize learning opportunities for current students and celebrate the positive aspects of a small learning environment that can support individual students;
- Review all student performance data and establish high expectations and a focus on continuous improvement for each student.

Community

Characteristics: 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:

- School council and community are proud of the school, and value the work the school does to support learners,
- Staff work together cooperatively and support each other and a commitment to professional growth is evident. Staff meetings are participatory and often used for professional development
 - Although acknowledging the need for continued growth, staff expressed a desire to focus on the many positives at the school,
 - Staff would also appreciate visiting other schools and classrooms and connecting with Department consultants on a more reliable basis;
- Parents are actively involved in the school particularly at the elementary level;
- Along with an active School Council, the school has a Parent Action Committee (PAC) that helps with fundraising and making connections to the community
 - The PAC expressed concern that all students had to go home for lunch each day and that during the winter weather students have to be picked up or walk a fair distance in very cold conditions.
- Students have a variety of opportunities for leadership;
- The school is building a relationship with Ross River students,
 - To strengthen this relationship there needs to be qualified drivers for the school bus;
- The school is an important component of community with good links and historic good relationship with ambulance, the fire department, reading programs, and recreation centre/extracurricular activities that complements school programs;
- Staff and School Council expressed some concerns about attendance particularly at the secondary level.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Work with the school council and the community to resolve the lunchtime concerns,
 - Create a process to deal with contentious issues as they arise. This may involve the review and revision of the school conflict resolution policy;
- Work with staff and school council to focus on the strengths of the school and further enhance communications and working relationships;
 - Maintain and strengthen relationships with the community;
- Strengthen the connection to Ross River and possibly Carmacks to work collaboratively to broaden secondary opportunities,
 - Ensure that there is a qualified driver available for the bus;
- Review attendance and the attendance policy at the school and evaluate the reasons for non-attendance,
 - Develop strategies to address attendance issues that are not punitive but rather encourage students to come to school,
 - School council and parents may provide insight and assistance in this work.

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 school facility is large and well maintained with a shop, art room, and spaces for drama, music, outdoor education,
 - Resources to support outdoor education are a strength, however, the Rural Experiential Model (REM) is not in place this year but planned for 2012-2013,
 - Students can work on independent studies and there will be an opportunity for credit recovery in the second semester,
 - Declining enrolment has had some impact on secondary program offerings;
- The Kettle Café and the “super store” initiatives are exemplary and promote both social justice and community engagement at the school;
- Staff provide homework support for students just before lunch time and after school twice a week;
- The school growth plan identifies differentiated instruction and assessment for learning as key classroom practices and examples of the use of rubrics and performance standards were evident at the school. However, the Team noted a potential over-reliance on textbooks and worksheets in some areas;
- Although some connections with Ross River have been made in the past, the school is interested in expanding the use of the school and its facilities at the secondary level to include Ross River and other rural communities.
- Given the enrolment at the time of the review, the school is comprised of split grades. However, the small number of students at each level provides an opportunity for the school to focus on a more individualized approach to learning,
- The timetable in place at the time of the review did not maximize prime teaching time, the need for consistency of delivery or provide adequate time on task for students particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy,

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Build on the experiential component of the school by integrating opportunities across grades and curricular areas,
 - Ensure that REM or an equivalent is in place for next year;
- Work with the Department to building the capacity of staff, particularly those new to the school and or new to the profession, to individualize student programs and or manage students at multiple levels. This includes approaches that reduce the reliance on textbooks and focuses on active, inquiry based learning;
 - This would also include providing time for staff to connect with other classrooms across Yukon;
- Use technology to enhance program offerings and opportunities for all students particularly those at secondary school,
 - Explore ways to build online communities;

- Review and revise the timetable and secondary schedules so that there is adequate time on task for all students particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy development,
 - Consider using a school-wide or elementary literacy block approach;
- Work with the Department to look at creative ways to support secondary student success and possibly make further use of some of the facilities at DVG,
 - Connections to neighbouring schools or even Whitehorse schools, students and programs could also be made electronically or through a reciprocal visit type of approach.

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:

- Students at Del Van Gorder generally do quite well as they move through elementary and secondary school. However, current evidence indicates a need to strengthen literacy skills as well as challenge stronger students,
 - Staff observed that students appear to be weaker in the areas of critical thinking, using processes to address problems in mathematics and other academic areas but generally have a grasp of basic concepts;
- The school is using criteria referenced rubrics and students are involved in self-assessment rubrics;
- The 2011-2012 school growth plan, developed with the previous principal, was a collaborative effort with staff and community including an outreach strategy that touched every school family in the community
 - The plan was built on previous directions and contained rubrics in relation to the development of a professional learning community,
 - Not all of the targets in the plan relate to student outcomes;
- Staff and school council appeared to have varying degrees of connection to the plan. Many find it a useful document but several staff commented on the complexity of the plan and would appreciate more simplicity,
 - One staff member suggested that the current plan provides an overarching direction for the school from which can be refined into a more specific focus.

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Explore way to support the development of literacy skills specifically related to critical thinking and problem solving as well as ways to challenge stronger learners,
 - This includes exploring balanced literacy, reading and writing workshop approaches that can allow more students to work together as well as individually;
- Continue to focus on differentiated instruction, criteria referenced assessment and student self-assessment;
- Honouring the previous work done on the school growth plan and the collaborative commitment involved in its development, refine the plan to focus on specific strategies and targets related to student outcomes.

Conclusions:

Del Van Gorder is a safe caring place for students to learn and grow. The school is in the midst of a change brought about by new leadership at the school and some new staff who have joined the school in the last few years. Building solid internal and external working relationships, enhancing staff capacity, connecting with neighbouring schools and focusing on a variety of approaches for students to meet and exceed learning outcomes will support continued student success at the school.

Practices to share:

- Student run Kettle Café
- Superstore for primary students with monies earned going to charity
- Parent Action Committee