

# ABORIGINAL CHOICE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT TEAM REPORT

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# ABORIGINAL CHOICE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT TEAM REPORT

JANUARY 12, 2010

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*We value education as a ceremony that brings relationships together. We recognize that we share a role in shaping content and process and that in order to build a healthy set of relationships it is necessary to follow the proper protocol for working in the community.*

## **BACKGROUND**

Prince George's Aboriginal community has been working towards the establishment of an Aboriginal choice school for over fifteen years, starting with the first Malatest Report in 1995 and the suggestions contained therein for improving Aboriginal students' experience in the formal education system. A detailed timeline is included in Section 2.3.1 of this report.

The reasons why Aboriginal youth do not graduate from the British Columbia school system at the same rate as non-Aboriginal youth are many and complex (Makhoul, 2000). We understand how important it is for students to see themselves positively reflected and represented in the images they see and in the curriculum taught.

The Aboriginal Education Board and the Choice Management Committee, as defined by School District No. 57 Policy 6172.2 (Choice of Programs and Schools), developed the Aboriginal Choice School Statement of Philosophy. This statement received approval in principle from the Board of Education at its public meeting of June 23, 2009. The Superintendent of Schools subsequently created a development team. The team was comprised of:

- Charlotte Henay, District Principal, Aboriginal Education (Chair)
- Bruce Ballantyne, Assistant Superintendent
- Ben Berland, Aboriginal Education Board
- Alex Bernard, Parent
- Craig Brennan, Principal, Carney Hill Neighbourhood School
- Sharon Cairns, Assistant Superintendent
- Bonnie Chappell, Director of Student Services
- Marlene Erickson, Aboriginal Education Board
- Frank Frederick, Elder
- Ray Gerow, Aboriginal Education Board
- Jolene Giroux, Parent
- Michael Hart, Aboriginal Education Officer
- Garrett Hollybow, Teacher
- James Kematch, Aboriginal Education Worker, Carney Hill
- Karen Neu, Lheidli T'enneh Band

The development team was charged with the responsibility to consider the policy in preparing a report for the Board's consideration.

Following weekly meetings, group and independent research, and ongoing discussion, the team developed 22 recommendations.

Note that the recommendations are organized to correspond with Administrative Procedure 2.3 of Policy 6172.2 (Choice of Programs and Schools), which specifies the issues that must be considered by the development team in preparing its report. The recommendations have not been placed in order of priority.

## **OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED PROGRAM OR SCHOOL**

### **Philosophical, organizational and/or curricular uniqueness**

#### **Recommendation 1:**

Phase in implementation of an open access school model with the school as the locus of service provision to children and families (Spence, 2009). The first stage of implementation, for 2010-2011, is to encompass an instructional day that is responsive to community needs.

Develop a plan to allow for after school instructional and recreational programming for students and families.

#### **Recommendation 2:**

School and district administration undertake a feasibility study to examine and document as best practice the calendar model of year-round schooling. This study should include a survey of current and recent practice in school districts in British Columbia and across Canada for the purpose of establishing future directions in the implementation of a 24/7/365 facility schedule, including the resources and partnerships necessary to support this endeavour.

#### **Recommendation 3:**

Structure classes as families of learners, with multi-age groupings in a cycle of learning. Each cycle is to be organized within a three year continuum of learning.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

Develop an Elder in Residence Program immediately to ensure a highly visible, full-time presence of Elders in the school. The Elder in Residence program is an integral part of the school community and guides decision-making and planning processes.

**Recommendation 5:**

Develop a policy framework to support the establishment of an Elders' Council, which will provide guidance and advice in the governance of the Aboriginal Choice School. We further recommend that training be provided to enhance Elders' participation in the formal education system as advisors and guides and to support staff interactions within the parameters of protocol and cultural safety.

**Recommendation 6:**

Begin immediate development of a theme-based curriculum, which incorporates Aboriginal languages, culture and perspective into the British Columbia Intended Learning Outcomes for all grade levels.

**Recommendation 7:**

Plan for the implementation of a holistic approach to teaching within a differentiated and a constructivist methodological framework. See key elements within the body of the report.

**Recommendation 8:**

Begin immediate development of a comprehensive Dakelh language program, in the local Lheidli dialect, which will be offered at all grade levels.

**Recommendation 9:**

Implement an oral language program, with special attention paid to the development and practice of language nests in StrongStart and Kindergarten classes for September 2010.

**Recommendation 10:**

Develop and complete school and student profiles to inform school, program and student needs for September 2010. See key elements within the body of the report.

**Recommendation 11:**

Develop the Aboriginal Choice School discipline program for September 2010 founded on the principles and practices of restorative justice and restitution. School staff is to be made aware of and trained in both models. See key elements within the body of the report.

## **STUDENT, PARENT, STAFF AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

### **Recommendation 12:**

The Aboriginal Choice School espouses a model of open enrolment, providing that families and students adhere to the philosophy of the choice school, as detailed in the *School District No. 57 Aboriginal Choice School Statement of Philosophy*.

## **STAFFING, FACILITY AND RESOURCES**

### **Recommendation 13:**

Complete upgrades to both the building and grounds prior to September, 2010 to support the transformation to the Aboriginal Choice School. See key elements within the body of the report.

### **Recommendation 14:**

The Aboriginal Choice School retain the designation of community school.

### **Recommendation 15:**

Engage current partners immediately, so that existing supplementary funding at Carney Hill Neighbourhood School may be continued in the Aboriginal Choice School.

### **Recommendation 16:**

Create an Aboriginal Choice School Advisory Council with representation from the Parent Advisory Council, Aboriginal Education Board, Elders' Council & community partners to support the facility, methods of instruction, extra-curricular activities, social programs and staff in reflecting the cultures, languages, values, needs and teaching and learning traditions of the students.

### **Recommendation 17:**

Hire a principal of Aboriginal ancestry for February 1, 2010.

Target to staff the school so that 50% of the school district positions are filled by qualified candidates of Aboriginal ancestry for September, 2010. All subsequent vacant positions at the Aboriginal Choice School will be filled by qualified candidates.

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## **PROMOTION OF SCHOOL OR PROGRAM**

### **Recommendation 18:**

Develop and implement a strategic communications plan for the Aboriginal Choice School.

### **Recommendation 19:**

Initiate a process to ensure continued community engagement.

## **CATCHMENT AREA ISSUES**

### **Recommendation 20:**

The catchment area for the Aboriginal Choice School encompass the existing catchment area for Carney Hill Neighbourhood School and that enrolment be open to any School District No. 57 student choosing to attend the Aboriginal Choice School (space permitting). Parents of students within the current catchment area who would prefer not to attend the Aboriginal Choice School may use the transfer process to enrol their child in another school.

### **Recommendation 21:**

Transportation be provided for students throughout the Prince George area to attend the Aboriginal Choice School. The implementation team should explore potential partnerships and sources of funding to support bussing for Aboriginal Choice School students.

## **IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE**

### **Recommendation 22:**

The implementation timeline be adopted as follows:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Report to Board of Education	January 12, 2010	Approval of report and initiation of Administrative Procedure 2.4. The Superintendent of Schools develops a budget to support the work of the implementation team.

Creation of Implementation Team	February 1, 2010	The recommended composition of the Implementation Team is a cross-section of school district staff and community representatives. It reflects the partnership between Aboriginal Education Board members, School district staff and community partners, including elders, parents, students, community members and school staff. The team begins work immediately.
Aboriginal Principal Assigned/Hired	February 1, 2010	The principal is an integral Implementation team member and collaborates on the implementation/transition process to Aboriginal Choice School. In consideration of the uniqueness of this process and school, a committee is created and engages in the design and execution of the hiring process. This group includes Aboriginal Education Board member(s), elder(s), Aboriginal Education District Principal, Assistant Superintendent, Aboriginal Choice School parent(s), Aboriginal staff and community representative(s).
Public Profile Development	February, 2010	Community and partner group consultation engaged in, as per report recommendations, to support the development of a comprehensive Aboriginal Choice School profile. Community consultation pays particular attention to inviting participation of students and families in the Aboriginal Choice School implementation and enrolment process with an eye to strengthening a sense of belonging and self-determination.
Vice-Principal Assigned/Hired	March, 2010	
Staffing Process	March, 2010	The Aboriginal Choice School principal, in partnership with the Aboriginal Choice School Advisory Council, interview and select candidates for available positions based on criteria established in accordance with the principles inherent in the Aboriginal Choice School Statement of Philosophy and the scope of this report. Candidates have been screened by the Human Resources Department and are eligible for hiring.
Student Transfer Process	Spring 2010	
Naming and Logo	March 2010	Naming and logo for Aboriginal Choice School to be developed, reflective of the diversity of the community and a unifying force for Aboriginal Education as we move forward.

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School Organization	April 2010	Grade configuration and teaching assignments reflect the recommendations in Section 2.3.1
Facility Upgrades	March – July, 2010	Upgrades to facility completed for September 2010 as per Report recommendations in Section 2.3.3
Curriculum and Instruction	March – August, 2010	Develop curriculum framework and initiate training and professional development of staff.
Development of Mission/Vision/Values	September 2010	Administrative team initiate a mission/vision process in consultation with elders, families, staff, community members and students.

# ABORIGINAL CHOICE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT TEAM REPORT

JANUARY 12, 2010

## INTRODUCTION

This report consists of a number of recommendations that stem from ongoing Aboriginal Choice Development Team meetings and conversations around what best practice is in Aboriginal education. Partnership with the Aboriginal community is essential in the development of successful Aboriginal education initiatives.

The British Columbia Ministry of Education (MoE) continues to articulate Aboriginal Education amongst its foremost priorities, as attested to by the following affirmations of its commitment to continue:

- involving Aboriginal community representatives in the planning and delivery of programs.
- increasing voice through an Aboriginal education advisory committee.
- monitoring the performance of Aboriginal students at provincial and district levels.
- examining ways to improve school success of inner-city Aboriginal students.
- supporting the creation of programs that address racism issues in the education system.
- examining the over-representation of Aboriginal students in special education/ severe behaviour categories.
- examining the effectiveness of full-day kindergarten and alternatives.
- developing inventories of Aboriginal languages and K-12 language programs in B.C.
- evaluating Aboriginal language programs in schools and determining effective practices.
- encouraging the integration of Aboriginal content across the curriculum.
- increasing local autonomy in implementing Aboriginal funding.
- enhancing cooperation between the Aboriginal and education communities
- emphasizing Aboriginal students' academic success, including Aboriginal language, culture, and history.
- promoting effective partnerships between the education communities and Aboriginal communities.

In addition, research literature bears out the validity of our group process and further identifies that the elements of success for Aboriginal schools are as follows:

- Strong leadership and governance structures, often with long tenure.
- High expectations for students.
- Focus on academic achievement and long-term success.
- Secure and welcoming climates for children and families.
- Respect for Aboriginal culture and traditions to make learning relevant.
- Quality staff development.
- Provision of a wide range of programs/supports for learning.

The stimulus for this report is Recommendation 10 from the Aboriginal Education Task Force Report, issued in February 2008:

*Recommendation 10 - Aboriginal Choice Elementary School*

*That the Board of Education, School District No. 57 (Prince George) enter into immediate community consultation with the intent of designating an existing elementary school as an Aboriginal K-7 choice elementary school, effective as early as September 1, 2008.*

The choice school process in School District No. 57 is guided by Policy 6172.2 (*Choice of Programs and Schools*). Administrative Procedure 2.3 of that policy requires a development team to consider the following issues in preparing a report for the Board:

*2.3.1 Overview of proposed program or school*

- a) Philosophical, organizational and/or curricular uniqueness*
- b) Need*
- c) Primary objectives*

*2.3.2 Student, parent, staff and community support*

- a) Estimate of enrolment*
- b) Any entrance stipulations*

*2.3.3 Staffing, facility and resource considerations*

- a) Desired attributes of facility*
- b) If the facility being considered is an existing operating school, then consultation with the administration and staff of the school and its parent advisory council should occur.*

c) *Additional financial resources, material or support required.*

d) *Staffing issues.*

2.3.4 *Promotion of the school or program.*

2.3.5 *Catchment area issues*

2.3.6 *Implementation timeline*

This report is organized to correspond with this list.

## **OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED ABORIGINAL CHOICE SCHOOL**

### **❖ Philosophical, organizational and/or curricular uniqueness**

#### **STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

As Indigenous peoples of North America, the Aboriginal community has a unique relationship with Canada. Policy acknowledges their role as the First Peoples, recognizes the historic contributions of Aboriginal communities and their diverse cultures and acknowledges the vital role that the Aboriginal communities play today and into the future.

All Aboriginal<sup>i</sup> students are entitled to not only the quality holistic education that is available to all our students, which includes programming that:

- is intellectually demanding;
- reflects a depth of knowledge and understanding;
- is connected to their lives, culture and future beyond the classroom;
- uses technology to enhance learning;
- provides opportunities for meaningful discussion, dialogue and conversation;
- encourages risk-taking;
- encourages different viewpoints;

but which also validates, recognizes, and facilitates the revitalization of Aboriginal cultures, histories, values, and languages.

The establishment of an Aboriginal Choice School represents a unique responsibility and opportunity to promote harmonious relationships and the co-existence of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike. The benefits and influence of this philosophy will be felt by all students, families, and staff in School District No. 57.

Through understanding, acceptance, respect and recognition, it is the objective of the Aboriginal Choice School to be a forerunner in the elimination of cultural alienation, racism and negative social attitudes within the school community and the wider community.

The success of Aboriginal students is a shared responsibility and the Aboriginal Choice School is an instrument to further Aboriginal holistic lifelong learning as an essential endeavour that can benefit us all. Working in partnership with the elders and the Aboriginal communities to create a safe, respectful, positive and integrated educational environment that acknowledges Aboriginal cultures and history and is responsive to the unique needs of Aboriginal students, the Aboriginal Choice School strengthens program and service delivery by:

- enhancing the educational experience of all students in the school;
- valuing, honouring and respecting Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and learning;
- recognizing the displacement of Aboriginal peoples in Canada as an historical fact that contributes to a sense of ongoing grief and loss felt by Aboriginal communities;
- addressing individual and systemic racism and its negative impacts on learning;
- working hard to deal with a history of Aboriginal exclusion and marginalization;
- developing a better understanding of how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples can think together;
- establishing and maintaining positive relationships between schools and the Aboriginal communities;
- establishing a learning process that builds on the development of social relationships and networks based on trust and shared values. These support success for all Aboriginal students in school and in life and foster community well-being.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

1. Recognition of the traditional and fundamental importance of elders in the Aboriginal community.
2. Acknowledgement and promotion of understanding, respect and recognition of Aboriginal values and cultures.

3. An ongoing relationship with the Aboriginal communities in our schools and across the district.
4. Working collaboratively with families, community agencies, organizations and education institutions to maximize opportunities for Aboriginal student success in schooling and in life.
5. Active recruitment of qualified Aboriginal staff in all classifications to develop a workforce which is representative of the communities within its jurisdiction.
6. Recognition that individual learning is viewed as but one part of a collective that extends beyond the family, community and nation, *en cha hunà<sup>ii</sup>*. To compartmentalize Aboriginal holistic lifelong learning may contradict the integrative nature of this perspective.<sup>iii</sup>
7. Commitment to supporting and empowering Aboriginal students to achieve personal success, including high school completion, ensuring their individual, physical, spiritual, mental and emotional needs are met.
8. Recognition that through language, Aboriginal peoples transmit cultural knowledge from one generation to another and make sense of their shared experience. Aboriginal languages are the basic media for the transmission and survival of Aboriginal consciousness, cultures, literatures, histories, religions, political institutions and values. As such, the Aboriginal Choice School curriculum will reflect a commitment to language revitalization and bi-cultural education.<sup>iv</sup>
9. Addressing issues that are of concern to Aboriginal peoples with a focus on Aboriginal traditions of thought and experience.
10. Infusion of Aboriginal outcomes in the core curriculum to promote better understanding of, and knowledge about, our Aboriginal peoples by all students.
11. Adaptation of B.C. curriculum content to local needs and curriculum development as an on-going exercise.
12. Supporting the use of a range of bias-free and culturally responsive assessment instruments and practices, including uniquely Indigenous success indicators and data that measures experiential, non-formal and informal learning for Aboriginal people.
13. Recognition of the value of early learning to enhance literacy and numeracy growth opportunities.
14. Recognition of the importance of transition programming to support students moving from school to school, division to division, and to post-secondary or the world of work

15. Recognition of the principles and practices of restorative justice and restitution.

*(Adopted by the Board of Education of School District No. 57 on June 23, 2009.)*

## **ORGANIZATION**

The development team has understood organization to encompass unique aspects of an Aboriginal Choice school such as: the school calendar, scheduling, programming and student groupings as well as teacher assignment.

### **Recommendation 1:**

Phase-in implementation of an open access school model with the school as the locus of service provision to children and families (Spence, 2009). The first stage of implementation, for 2010-2011, is to encompass an instructional day that is responsive to community needs.

Develop a plan to allow for after school instructional and recreational programming for students and families.

### **Rationale:**

*In open access schools, children engage in creative educational projects and cultural enrichment from early in the morning until evening, and all summer long. School-wide service projects are a focus of ongoing initiatives and may include sponsoring a Seniors Day, undertaking a beautification project, sponsoring a luncheon for new students, organizing noontime intramural sports, and providing a luncheon for volunteer parents. Parents are welcome in the open access school and may access parenting programs there. Children also take active part in community service. Projects might include organizing canned food drives; taking part in a community cleanup day; offering child care to parents attending school functions; planning a blood drive; and offering computer training.*

**Open access schools fall on a continuum;** some have one-item add-ons such as after-school enrichment programs, while others constitute a fully realized and comprehensive alternative model. Almost all are built on partnerships between the school and such groups as community services, universities, businesses, churches, libraries, museums, the police, and youth agencies. All extend the school hours and all are child-centred (Spence, 2009). See Appendix I.

### **Recommendation 2:**

School and district administration undertake a feasibility study to examine and document as best practice the calendar model of year-round schooling. This study should include a survey of current and recent practice in school districts in British Columbia and across Canada for the purpose of establishing future directions in the implementation of a 24/7/365 facility schedule, including the resources and partnerships necessary to support this endeavour.

#### **Rationale:**

*There has been engaged conversation about the implementation of year-round schooling. It is widely recognized and supported in research that achievement gains and losses occur and/or are supported over the summer. Accumulating research has established that some students gain over the summer and some lose, depending on their summer experiences. Changes in score can clearly not be attributed solely to what happens during the school year. Family income impacts considerably on access students have to activities/supports over the summer break. Students in inner-city areas are disproportionately restricted in their access to enrichment. Large gaps exist between white and non-white students in the degree to which achievement grows during the summer (Barton and Coley, 2009). Year-round schooling has been implemented to considerable acclaim and success in a number of school districts nationally.*

### **Recommendation 3:**

Structure classes as families of learners with multi-age groupings in a cycle of learning. Each cycle is to be organized within a three-year continuum of learning.

#### **Rationale:**

*Multi-age groups can be a natural way for teachers to “share” students. It allows them to work fully as a team, not only for planning or setting common goals together, but actually sharing students. Cycle teams take on a variety of shades and are not uniquely and uniformly equated to multi-age groups. As school staffs move from team building to a vision of shared responsibility for all students, the teachers begin to apply a variety of models to decompartmentalize instruction.*

*Teachers share responsibility for students in a variety of ways: by cycle, by interest, by projects, by subject area, by language of instruction. Teachers adopt these strategies as their comfort level increases. In cycle one, for example, all students come to Mr. X’s room for music instruction and practice. English Language Arts is done in a multi-age class group whereas students go back to a grade level grouping for mathematics. Cycle one (primary)*

*teachers may weave in and out of a variety of groupings according to situational requirements and their comfort level.*

*There are also a variety of models of teacher teaming. In some cycle teams, teachers work very closely together as a unit on all classroom activities, whereas in others they might plan a project in which they set common goals, choose targeted competencies, agree on learning strategies and evaluation. Having a common focus, they can help each other, but they remain free to implement the project in their own way. They sometimes go further and share students in multi-class collaborative groups to answer the needs of a specific project. In this way they also share the responsibility for all the students in their cycle (LEARN).*

#### **Recommendation 4:**

Develop an Elder in Residence Program immediately to ensure a highly visible, full-time presence of elders in the school. The Elder in Residence program is an integral part of the school community and guides decision-making and planning processes.

#### **Rationale:**

*Elders are distinguished Aboriginal leaders. An Elder in Residence program brings Aboriginal Elders into the school and provides an opportunity for students, families and staff to interact with elders and learn from their wisdom and experience<sup>v</sup>. Healthy elders help teach in the area of positive self-identity, cultural awareness and emotional learning (MoE 2006).*

#### **Recommendation 5:**

Develop a policy framework to support the establishment of an Elders' Council, which will provide guidance and advice in the governance of the Aboriginal Choice School. We further recommend that training be provided to enhance elders' participation in the formal education system as advisors and guides and to support staff interactions within the parameters of protocol and cultural safety.

### **CURRICULAR UNIQUENESS**

#### **Recommendation 6:**

Begin immediate development of a theme-based curriculum, which incorporates Aboriginal languages, culture and perspective into the British Columbia Intended Learning Outcomes for all grade levels.

### **Recommendation 7:**

Plan for the implementation of a holistic approach to teaching within a differentiated and a constructivist methodological framework. Key elements include but are not limited to:

- Respect for and teaching of the protocols of the Territory and the Nations that make up our Aboriginal community;
- Development of each student's essence through story, song, and identity with Indigenous storywork as a pillar of the elementary school curriculum project - incorporating the seven principles of respect, reciprocity, responsibility, reverence, holism, interrelatedness and synergy (Archibald, 2008);
- Making strong connections to ancestral ties/ relationships;
- Developing pride in self-identity to counteract emptiness and loss;
- Public speaking, direction in hosting and holding meetings as well as native governance as inseparable facets of this foundation in the oral tradition;
- A Native Science curriculum at the center of which is Traditional Environmental Knowledge;
- Spirituality and ceremonies, but not religion, as a thread that weaves the curriculum and instructional practice together and is an integral part of each day;
- Career education;

### **Rationale:**

*The pedagogy of the Aboriginal Choice School is founded in the following Aboriginal Principles of Learning, from the B.C. Ministry of Education, English First Peoples 12 Integrated Resource Package:*

### *Learning:*

- *Supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, the ancestors;*
- *Is holistic, reflective, reflexive, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place);*
- *Involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions;*

- *Involves generational roles and responsibilities;*
- *Recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge;*
- *Is embedded in memory, history and story;*
- *Involves patience and time;*
- *Requires exploration of one's identity;*
- *Involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.*

**Recommendation 8:**

Begin immediate development of a comprehensive Dakelh language program, in the local Lheidli dialect, which will be offered at all grade levels.

**Recommendation 9:**

Implement an oral language program, with special attention paid to the development and practice of language nests in StrongStart and Kindergarten classes for September 2010.

**Rationale:**

*Language is the vehicle for culture. Aboriginal languages provide communities with an important connection to their culture, roots and identity. For many communities the revitalization of their language means a revitalization of their culture and their community, and serves as a way to contribute to healing from the traumas of the past. The benefits of language revitalization include, but are not limited to:*

- *Positive effects on personal and collective self-esteem, identity and sense of cultural and personal belonging*
- *Strengthening of the community and its members through the improvement of spiritual, mental, physical and emotional wholeness*
- *Acceptance and understanding of the connection between language and cultural well-being (Kavanagh, 1999)*

*Lodged in the heart of the First Peoples, within their own worldviews and social systems, language fosters the source of connectivity between the spiritual and physical realms. Cast within this reality, language embraces feelings and spirit and is integral to a holistic sense of being distinctive and inherent in the lands occupied by generations of Aboriginal language speakers (Makokis, 2009).*

### **Recommendation 10:**

Develop and complete school and student profiles to inform school, program and student needs for September 2010. These needs may include:

- Changing the timetable to reflect the school community's needs
- Accessing and using technology in the creation of an Aboriginal language resource centre which acts as a "language hub" for community and district
- Staff support and development initiatives, such as summer institutes.
- Family support program which may include:
  - fostering emotional healing among children and families grieving loss
  - supporting strong connections between home and school in establishing continuity of what is taught in both.
  - making a safe environment for parents
  - welcoming others back who have been away i.e. children in care - disconnected from the community.
  - collective problem-solving, overcoming obstacles, pursuing answers.
  - continuous engagement between school staff and community; staff getting involved in other aspects of community life, besides school i.e. community events, and feasts.

### **Recommendation 11:**

Develop the Aboriginal Choice School discipline program for September 2010 founded on the principles and practices of restorative justice and restitution. School staff are to be made aware of and trained in both models.

#### **Rationale:**

*The roots of the modern restorative justice movement are derived from many social and philosophical movements; it is generally and respectfully acknowledged that restorative practices strive to embody the values and principles that are akin to and informed by holistic peace and justice-making processes in many Aboriginal communities.*

*Restorative practice is an approach to discipline where those involved in the situation are part of the process to make restitution. Students come to understand the true consequences of their actions, and all parties then have a say in identifying ways the harm that has been done can be repaired.*

*Restorative practice strives to ensure students truly take responsibility for the hurt they have caused others, and take steps to make it right. It creates an explicit practice framework, a whole school approach involving all partners that ensures consistency and a common language from home and school and sustainability of the practice.*

*Layered onto the Restorative Justice practice is restitution. The model of Restitution helps children explore the reasons for their behaviour. Children learn that they can meet their needs negatively or positively and fix their mistakes when they make them. Restitution, like Restorative Justice, creates conditions for students to fix their mistakes for themselves, and to return to the group strengthened. Adults encourage students to make their own plan for restitution, and to become self-directed learners (Macgregor, 2003).*

*Restitution is based on the premise that every behaviour has a motivating factor and is therefore not random. Understanding the motivation and supporting students while they learn to understand themselves, contributes to lasting, intrinsic solutions.*

*The following list better defines the concept:*

- *A philosophy based on respect and a common belief that builds community, empowers individuals, and resolves conflict;*
- *Restitution is not about payback or saying, “I’m sorry” but about healing;*
- *Restitution is an invitation rather than a requirement to fix our mistakes;*
- *Restitution is about looking at the need behind the problem. “What’s it getting you?” (Belonging, Power, Freedom, Fun);*
- *Restitution teaches people to look inside rather than outside for answers;*
- *Restitution is about self-restitution—being the person you want to be;*
- *The goal of restitution is self-evaluation and learning a better way;*
- *Restitution is more about “being” than about “doing”.*

*School District No. 57, in partnership with the Aboriginal Education Board and the Prince George Urban Aboriginal Justice Society, implemented a pilot project in Restorative Justice at the high school level in 2007. This initiative is well established.*

## ❖ **Need**

The Aboriginal Education Board of School District No. 57 (AEB) has been a long-time proponent of a choice school in Prince George. As the success rates of Aboriginal children did not rise significantly over time, they began researching best practices in education of Aboriginal youth. Two sites in Canada came to light: Amiskwaciy Academy in Edmonton, AB and Children of the Earth School in Winnipeg, MB. After Aboriginal Education Board members toured Amiskwaciy Academy with the then Superintendent of Schools, administrators and two school district trustees, the determination to achieve this goal for Aboriginal students' success became stronger.

Reports were written by trustee Michelle Marrelli and researchers Paul Michel, Paul Madak and Mavis Erickson which validated choice school praxis. Unfortunately, the choice school concept lost momentum until the Aboriginal Education Board commissioned Robert Malatest Consultants to conduct a second assessment of Aboriginal education in School District No. 57 in 2005, ten years after Malatest's first survey. The Malatest Report showed that Aboriginal student success rates had improved very little in ten years, and some recommendations made in 1995 had never been acted upon. As a result of this report, the Board of Education struck a Task Force on Aboriginal Education which began its work in September 2007.

Aboriginal students do not see themselves or their culture reflected in the current system, whereas Euro-Canadian students do. The education system does not address the realities in which Aboriginal children live.

Successful students have attributed their success in part to positive Aboriginal role models in the school system and have expressed the need for there to be greater representation of Aboriginal educators within the system (Erickson and Henay, 2009).

BACKGROUND:

**May, 1995:** First Malatest Report on Aboriginal Education in School District No.57.

**Summer 1997:** As a result of the recommendations in the Malatest Report, the AEB explores Choice School proposal.

**2001:** Michelle Marrelli, School District No. 57 trustee, prepares a report on Aboriginal Choice Schooling.

**2004:** British Columbia Ministry of Education proposes to locate an Aboriginal Centre for Excellence in Education in Prince George. A provincial design committee is struck and headed by Dr. Lorna Williams. The committee initiates the work of creating a Statement of Philosophy and framework for the Aboriginal Centre of Excellence.

**February, 2005:** Michel, Erickson and Madak submit a report entitled *Why an Aboriginal Public School?* to the Aboriginal Education Board of SD57. This report is a literature review of factors shown to enhance the success of Aboriginal students, including a survey of existing Aboriginal choice schools in other jurisdictions.

**June, 2007:** R.A. Malatest and Associates publish their Aboriginal Education Needs Assessment Project Report in School District No. 57. The results of the needs assessment suggest that there is some frustration in the Aboriginal community because the Prince George education system has made little progress in terms of enhancing the education provided to Aboriginal learners. The following feature in the executive summary of the Report:

- Improving the quality of education for Aboriginal students will be a joint responsibility between the district including school trustees, the schools, the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal parents.
- There is only modest satisfaction among the Aboriginal community with respect to the quality of education given to Aboriginal learners.
- Results from the previous research show that, in 1995, the various informant groups were similarly dissatisfied with the way language, history and culture were addressed in the curriculum (Malatest 2007)

**September, 2007:** In response to the release of the second Malatest Report, commissioned by the Aboriginal Education Board of School District No. 57 and co-sponsored by the Urban Aboriginal Strategy, the Superintendent of Schools struck an Aboriginal Education Task Force. This task force undertook an extensive consultative process with community and education partners.

**February, 2008:** The Aboriginal Education Task Force Report was issued, with eleven key recommendations for transformation of education for Aboriginal students within School District No. 57. The task force requested that the district enter into consultations with the intent of establishing an Aboriginal Choice School, with a projected opening date of September, 2008<sup>vi</sup>.

**October, 2008:** A Choice School Consultation Steering Committee undertook a consultative process with the school community in four short-listed schools, to share information about the Aboriginal Choice School concept and to get community feedback on the possible location of the school at their respective site. As a result of this process Carney Hill Neighbourhood School was designated as the site for the future Aboriginal Choice School.

**January, 2009:** School District No. 57 Board of Trustees received the steering committee's consultation report at a public Board meeting. Under the terms of the Board's choice school policy, the Superintendent of Schools formed a Choice School Management Committee which in turn designated an Aboriginal Choice School Development Team, comprised of a Lheidli T'enneh Elder and community representative, senior school district staff, Aboriginal Education Board members, the principal, staff representatives and parents from Carney Hill Neighbourhood School.

**October, 2009:** The development team begins weekly meetings to provide input into the key components of an Aboriginal Choice School model. The working group described the program components and examined the advantages and disadvantages of suggested options under the categories of Policy 6172.2.

**January 12, 2010:** The Aboriginal Choice School Development Team presents its report to the Board of Trustees at a board meeting.

#### RATIONALE: WHY DO WE NEED AN ABORIGINAL CHOICE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?

- To increase the success of Aboriginal students, especially academically.
- To provide a better quality of education for a better quality of life... meeting the needs of students i.e. changes in instructional style, content, etc.
- To create a safe place for Aboriginal students and their families to get involved with education.
- To create a cultural hub for the community; changing the perception of what school is.
- The Aboriginal student population is growing, its proportion to the non-Aboriginal student population consistently on the rise. Aboriginal focused education is necessary to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal students.
- The high percentage of Aboriginal families in the Carney Hill Neighbourhood School catchment area. The current Aboriginal population of the school is 88%.

## ❖ Primary Objectives

- To infuse into the existing British Columbia curriculum, the references and sources of knowledge which come from the experiences, events and histories of peoples of Aboriginal descent, improving practices for Aboriginal students in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, classroom management and school organization within a culturally safe framework.<sup>vii</sup>
- To provide a high quality school experience for Aboriginal students, and to encourage the physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional growth of every student and staff member at the school.
- To anchor an inclusive curriculum and instruction approach within the Aboriginal Principles of Learning, so that students understand their world through the experiences and perspectives of diverse peoples while participating in the revitalization of their respective cultures.
- To use the real life experiences of the students and their social context as a basis for learning, for personal and social development and for positive relationship building among students, between students and adults, and between school and community.
- To create a belonging environment and share understanding within a school rooted in the tradition, principles and values of Aboriginal people, addressing the intergenerational consequences of Indian Residential Schools and colonial legacies that continue to compromise the success of Aboriginal people in Canada.
- To showcase best practices in Aboriginal education in B.C. and nationally, while initiating systemic change by creating a model that can implement and assess innovative Aboriginal education practice on a small scale, which can then be adopted by the larger system.
- To improve student success and completion rates based on the premise that school environments inclusive of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives will improve student success and completion rates, increase employability and reduce transience (Phillips, 2008).
- To meet the diverse needs of Urban Aboriginal students within a framework that allows for an integrated approach to Aboriginal education, linking health and support services from childhood to adulthood in a wellness model, respectful of and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal families.
- To continue to develop community partnerships that support collaboration between a variety of organizations and agencies and School District No. 57.

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## **STUDENT, PARENT, STAFF & COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

### **❖ Estimate of enrolment**

Discussions at the development team level focused on access for students and its impact on enrolment for the Aboriginal Choice School.

Current enrolment at Carney Hill is 143 students. Based on a prediction of a 90% retention rate for the Aboriginal Choice School, anticipated enrolment is approximately 130 students to begin the 2010-2011 school year. Enrolment numbers of the Aboriginal Choice School will develop along with the school and the district demographic.

The following are noted for consideration:

- The proportion of Aboriginal students in schools is on the rise in School District No. 57. Currently, Aboriginal students represent 23.5% of the student population in School District 57, and 88% at Carney Hill Neighbourhood School. If the proportion of Aboriginal students continues to rise as per the trend over the past five years, it could reach as much as 35% in the district by the year 2015.
- The availability of transportation to the school will considerably impact enrolment.
- A survey of all of the Aboriginal groups in the community should be conducted to further determine enrolment numbers once the school design and program is publicized.
- Historically, many of the registrations for Carney Hill Neighbourhood School occur on the first day of school.
- The open access model proposed for the Aboriginal Choice School may positively impact student enrolment.

### **❖ Any entrance stipulations**

The Choice School Consultation Steering Committee upheld the core belief that, first and foremost, we honour all children. Some of our teachings hold that children are given to us as teachers, to support us in the learning we must do to fulfill our own purpose, and in turn allow them to fulfill theirs. We feel it is vital to emphasize our enthusiasm about the benefits of teaching and learning within an Indigenous Knowledge framework for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. It is our conviction that shared understanding of each others' core beliefs and values will support and sustain better, stronger relationships and in turn contribute to reconciliation.

### **Recommendation 12:**

The Aboriginal Choice School espouses a model of open enrolment, providing that families and students commit to the philosophy of the choice school, as detailed in the *School District No. 57 Aboriginal Choice School Statement of Philosophy*.

## **STAFFING, FACILITY & RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS**

### **❖ Desired attributes of facility**

The Aboriginal Choice School facility should accommodate a comfortable and safe learning environment, a wide range of services for the families of the school and the community and reflect the school's unique designation. We recognize that pride in community contributes to a sense of ownership and engagement with both the facility and its programs.

### **Recommendation 13:**

Complete upgrades to both the building and grounds prior to September, 2010 to support the transformation to the Aboriginal Choice School. These include an elders' gathering room, Smartboards in each room and the Circle concept reflected in school/classroom organization.

#### **Rationale:**

*The careful use and organization of the space in our environment can support all children feeling safe and comfortable and knowing that they belong. As a result, they are helped to become independent and confident learners. The learning environment is the starting point for implementing instructional changes.*

### **❖ Consultation with administration, staff and parent advisory council**

For the purposes of this report we consulted specifically with the parent advisory council, administration and staff of Carney Hill Neighbourhood School. Results of the consultation within the parameters of the policy for staffing, facilities and resources are reflected in Appendix IV – for which we extend our thanks to the Carney Hill Neighbourhood School team.

### **❖ Additional financial resources, materials or support required.**

### **Recommendation 14:**

The Aboriginal Choice School retain the designation of community school.

### **Recommendation 15:**

Engage current partners immediately, so that existing supplementary funding at Carney Hill Neighbourhood School may be continued in the Aboriginal Choice School.

#### **Rationale:**

*The need for additional support and resources to designate community schools remains true in the Aboriginal Choice School in order to ensure equity of outcomes. An initiative that encourages and allows the school to accommodate a wider range of services for students and the community is called for.*

### **Recommendation 16:**

Create an Aboriginal Choice School Advisory Council with representation from Parent Advisory Council, Aboriginal Education Board, Elders' Council & community partners to support the facility, methods of instruction, extra-curricular activities, social programs and staff in reflecting the cultures, languages, values, needs and teaching and learning traditions of the students.

#### **Rationale:**

*Elders and community involvement in the school provides advice and guidance within an Aboriginal framework. Cultural responsiveness guidelines can be authenticated by this Council as can the development of training initiatives for staff to support them in meeting the expectation that they interweave Aboriginal perspective and pedagogy into their practice.*

## **❖ Staffing issues**

School District No. 57 is making application to the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal for the approval of a Special Program<sup>viii</sup>, enabling us to consider Aboriginal ancestry as a qualification for all positions in the Aboriginal Choice School. There is currently an exemption in place in the district for the CUPE staff positions of Aboriginal Education Worker and Aboriginal Teacher Assistant, as well as PGDTA Aboriginal Counsellor and PEA Aboriginal Social Worker.

School District No. 57 is proposing to continue to hire Aboriginal support staff through our special program exemption and endeavour to make the staffing of the Aboriginal Choice School as representative of the student body as possible leading over time to employment equity.

### **Recommendation 17:**

Hire a principal of Aboriginal ancestry for February 1, 2010.

Target to staff the school so that 50% of the school district positions are filled by qualified candidates of Aboriginal ancestry by September 2010. All subsequent vacant positions at the Aboriginal Choice School will be filled by qualified candidates.

#### **Rationale:**

*It is recognized that positive role models are essential to a student's personal and academic success. The development team further recognizes the importance of staffing the Aboriginal School with Aboriginal staff as an integral part of the qualifications that complement the skill set we are looking for in staff for the Aboriginal Choice School. In so doing, we are:*

- *Providing a greater number of positive Aboriginal role models in schools for our learners (this is an advantage for all learners, not just Aboriginal learners)*
- *Opening doors for Aboriginal employees. Though we may claim these doors have always been open, the perception by many Aboriginal people is that the system is closed*
- *Reinforcing to individuals, parents, and the Aboriginal community in general that we, School District No. 57, value the culture, support, and expertise that Aboriginal workers are best able to provide Aboriginal learners (Haley, 2009).*

*The principal's leadership role is key in focusing the vision and balancing its implementation with shared responsibility to community.*

*We believe that the ability to respond to the rapid and complex changes affecting the way we conduct business, and provide educational services is critical for success. An Aboriginal leader is imperative in order to provide information to clarify thinking and dispel myths about Aboriginal people, establishing linkages between historical events and present day issues. We look at the history of Canada from the point-of-view of Aboriginal people. Recognition, reconciliation and restitution are at the forefront of our education agenda. We believe this process is best facilitated by an Aboriginal education leader (Haley, 2009). See Appendix V.*

#### **❖ Promotion of school or program**

### **Recommendation 18:**

Develop and implement a strategic communications plan for the Aboriginal Choice School.

**Recommendation 19:**

Initiate a process to ensure continued community engagement.

**Rationale:**

*Regular and ongoing communication with the wider community initially falls under the mantle of the implementation team. Scheduled media releases/updates and ongoing dialogue/information exchange should feature in the Implementation Plan.*

*A number of misconceptions remain prevalent about both Aboriginal Choice schooling and the Aboriginal Choice School. Clear communication to dispel persistent myths about Aboriginal choice schooling are essential to the success of our endeavour.*

FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2010

1. Weekly press releases
2. School District No. 57 Internet updates
3. School District No. 57 Intranet updates
4. Website updates (differs in content)
5. Quicktime movie updates
6. Facebook/ MySpace discussion groups- by principal
7. Twitter
8. Electronic calendar updates
9. Inform and introduce current successes
10. Pamphlets
11. Posters
12. Vision board
13. Community feasts
14. Aboriginal support staff visits to homes in the community

## ON-GOING BASIS

1. Pamphlets – for community
2. Posters – for community
3. Community feasts
4. Aboriginal support staff visits to homes in community

## ❖ Catchment area issues

The development team deliberated on the issue of access for all students to the downtown location for the Aboriginal Choice School.

### **Recommendation 20:**

The catchment area for the Aboriginal Choice School encompass the existing catchment area for Carney Hill Neighbourhood School and that enrolment be open to any School District No. 57 student choosing to attend the Aboriginal Choice School (space permitting). Parents of students within the current catchment area who would prefer not to attend the Aboriginal Choice School may use the transfer process to enrol their child in another school.

### **Recommendation 21:**

Transportation be provided for students throughout the Prince George area to attend the Aboriginal Choice School. The implementation team should explore potential partnerships and sources of funding to support bussing for Aboriginal Choice School students.

### **Rationale:**

*One of the driving factors in designating an Aboriginal Choice School and implementing a unique program is to improve the success rates of Aboriginal students within the school system. It is critical to the success of those students who live outside the current catchment area that they have the option of attending this school to improve their life chances. Providing equity of access to ensure equity of outcomes for children around the city requires that we take into consideration the means available to those families and students wishing to enrol in the Aboriginal Choice School.*

❖ **Implementation timeline**

**Recommendation 22:**

The implementation team timeline be adopted as follows:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Report to Board of Education	January 12, 2010	Approval of report and initiation of Administrative Procedure 2.4. The Superintendent of Schools develops a budget to support the work of the Implementation Team.
Creation of Implementation Team	February 1, 2010	The recommended composition of the implementation team is a cross-section of school district staff and community representatives. It reflects the partnership between Aboriginal Education Board Members, school district staff and community partners, including elders, parents, students, community members and school staff. The Team begins work immediately.
Aboriginal Principal Assigned/hired	February 1, 2010	The principal is an integral Implementation Team member and collaborates on the implementation/transition process to an Aboriginal Choice School. In consideration of the uniqueness of this process and school, a committee is created and engages in the design and execution of the hiring process. This group includes Aboriginal Education Board member(s), elder(s), Aboriginal Education District Principal, Assistant Superintendent, Aboriginal Choice School parent(s), Aboriginal staff and community representative(s).

Public Profile Development	February 2010	Community and partner group consultation engaged in, as per report recommendations, to support the development of a comprehensive Aboriginal Choice School Profile. Community consultation pays particular attention to inviting participation of students and families in the Aboriginal Choice School implementation and enrolment process with an eye to strengthening a sense of belonging and self-determination.
Vice-Principal Assigned/Hired	March 2010	
Staffing Process	March 2010	The Aboriginal Choice School Principal, in partnership with the Aboriginal Choice School Advisory Council interview and select candidates for available positions based on criteria established in accordance with the principles inherent in the Aboriginal Choice School Statement of Philosophy and the scope of this report. Candidates have been screened by the Human Resources Department and are eligible for hiring.
Student Transfer Process	Spring 2010	
Naming and Logo	March 2010	Naming and logo for Aboriginal Choice School to be developed, reflective of the diversity of our community and a unifying force for Aboriginal Education as we move forward.
School Organization	April, 2010	Grade configuration and teaching assignments reflect the recommendations in Section 2.3.1
Facility Upgrades	March – July, 2010	Upgrades to facility completed for September 2010 as per Report recommendations in Section 2.3.3
Curriculum and Instruction	March – August, 2010	Develop curriculum framework and initiate training and professional development of staff.
Development of Mission/Vision/Values	September 2010	Administrative team initiate a Mission/Vision process in consultation with elders, families, staff, community members and students.

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## **ENDNOTES**

<sup>i</sup> An Aboriginal person is identified in accordance to the Constitution Act of 1982, Part II, Section 35(2), as “Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.” Canada’s Aboriginal population is distinct and diverse. “First Nation” is the generally preferred term for Indian peoples of Canada. The term “Indian” is still used where referring to legislation or government statistics.

<sup>ii</sup> *En cha hunà*: Dakelh/Carrier term for which the literal translation is respecting all forms of life.

<sup>iii</sup> For the purposes of comparison, we refer you to *Montessori Method of Bringing Up and Education Children: Montessori practice is always up-to-date and dynamic because observation and the meeting of needs is continual and specific for each child. When physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional needs are met children glow with excitement and a drive to play and work with enthusiasm, to learn, and to create. They exhibit a desire to teach, help, and care for others and for their environment.*

<sup>iv</sup> *Bi-cultural education: culture is not perceived and treated as another subject competing amongst many, but rather becomes pervasive throughout the curricula.*

<sup>v</sup> See British Columbia Ministry of Education (January 27, 2006). News Release Study Looks at Involving Aboriginal Elders in School for further information.

<sup>vi</sup> *SD57 Aboriginal Education Task Force Report: Recommendation 10 – Aboriginal Choice Elementary School  
That the Board of Education, School District No. 57 (Prince George) enter into immediate community consultation with the intent of designating an existing elementary school as an Aboriginal K-7 choice elementary school, effective as early as September 1, 2008.*

<sup>vii</sup> *Cultural safety: Cultural safety involves the recognition that we are all bearers of culture and we need to be aware of and challenge unequal power relations at the individual, family, community, and societal level. There are important differences between cultural safety and the following concepts which are closely aligned with cross-cultural models. The determination of cultural safety rests with the recipient of the service.*

- *cultural awareness*, the acknowledgement of difference
- *cultural sensitivity*, the recognition of the importance of respecting difference, a term often associated with cross-cultural education or *diversity training*
- *cultural competence*, describes the "skills, knowledge and attitudes" in practice.

<sup>viii</sup> *A special program is any program or activity that has as its objective the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups. Special programs are based on the principle that to promote effective equality and to eliminate discrimination, it may be necessary to treat individuals or groups differently in ways that recognize their actual needs.*

*An example of a special program approved in the past is where a school district hires a member of a protected group to provide services to students and families who are members of that same group. BC Human Rights Tribunal Available Online at [http://www.bchrt.bc.ca/policies/special\\_programs\\_policy.htm](http://www.bchrt.bc.ca/policies/special_programs_policy.htm)*