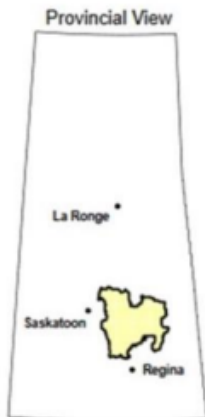


**Award Nomination
Submitted on behalf of
Horizon School Division
Board of Education**

Background:



Horizon School Division No. 205 operates 43 schools across east central Saskatchewan, with the central office in Humboldt. Horizon spans a geographic area of approximately 30,970 square kilometers. The First Nations of Day Star, Fishing Lake, George Gordon, Kawacatoose, Muskowekwan, One Arrow, Beardy's & Okemasis, and Yellow Quill can be found within the boundaries of Horizon.

Horizon School Division has continuously endeavoured to meet the needs of its most vulnerable students. This includes Indigenous students who struggle with academic success to graduation (even beyond high school). In 2020-21, 95.5% of non-First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (non-FNMI) students were graduating on-time (Provincial 2021 target is 91%), while only 48.3% of FNMI students were graduating on-time (Provincial 2021 target is 65%).

Horizon has participated fully in the Following Their Voices initiative that has been accessed throughout the province. Even with that, we have seen nominal gains and are striving to dig deeper into the cause and solution for the underlying issues that we see for our Indigenous students. Horizon's Board of Education, through the vision of the Director of Education, Kevin C. Garinger, undertook an action research project to focus on pedagogy and assessment through the lens of Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

This project is in direct response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC)¹ 10th and 12th Call to Action, which includes: "developing culturally appropriate curricula" (TRC, 2016, p. 149) and "developing culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families" (TRC, 2016, p. 152). Our project is intended to not only develop culturally appropriate curricula but to develop an instructional model that will continually inform schools, teachers, and Horizon School Division in the implementation of high quality responsive instruction for our Indigenous students. Through this project, we will build on the mutually respectful relationship we have with our First Nation partners.

Horizon submitted the initial project through the McDowell Foundation (affiliated through the Saskatchewan Teachers' Association) and have extended the project beyond the initial Mikiwahp (Tipi) Project to continue to build on place-based Indigenous Ways of Knowing. This project will become the foundation for Horizon School Division's Framework for Indigenous Ways of Knowing Pedagogy and Assessment Document. This framework will be shared provincially, but will be applied to the instruction and assessment of Indigenous students throughout Horizon School Division. The Board budgeted for this project regardless of potential grant monies. An Indigenous Instructional Coach has been hired to extend this project beyond this single event - looking additionally at land/space-based curriculum including Treaty, Residential Schools, Traditional Medicine, and Truth and Reconciliation.

¹ *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Nctr.ca. (2015). Retrieved 17 March 2021, from https://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf.

Vision:

As a result of this project, the following ideals will be achieved:

1. **Students will** be empowered and experience growth in all four dimensions of the Medicine Wheel.
2. **Students will** be empowered and regain connection with themselves, their culture, their language, their community, and their peers.
3. **Students will** be empowered and strengthen their self identity through seeing themselves as learners reflected in their learning environment. Students' identities will be validated through appropriate and responsive teaching.
4. **Students will** be empowered and demonstrate their understanding in a holistic way.
5. **Students will** be empowered and develop a love of learning through engaging pedagogy and culturally affirming content.
6. **Students will** be empowered and engaged with their learning and have experiences in school to celebrate and remember.
7. **Students will** be empowered and experience growth and efficacy as learners.
8. **Educators will** be empowered and create deeper connections and relationships with their Indigenous students and families.
9. **Educators will** be empowered and expand their understanding and capacity to build respectful holistic pedagogy and assessment practices.
10. **This project will** become the model for Indigenous pedagogy for Horizon School Division and beyond.

Research Questions:

In response to data (academic, behavioural, attendance, and anecdotal data) that indicates a disengagement with schools, curriculum, and a loss of identity and sense of belonging, this project questions not only the pedagogy of the teacher(s), but the very eurocentric curriculum that we apply to that pedagogy. This project is stretching outside of conventional thinking whereby European "outcomes" are established within classrooms and Indigenous content is added on. With this project, we begin with Indigenous content and overlay outcomes that can be assessed holistically through participation in the learning. We are looking at two important questions that will drive the success indicators for Indigenous students and educators:

1. Will engaging students in a mathematical study using the Mîkiwahp (tipi) as the foundation through the lens of holistic Indigenous Ways of Knowing improve **engagement, learning, and retention** of concepts in mathematics?

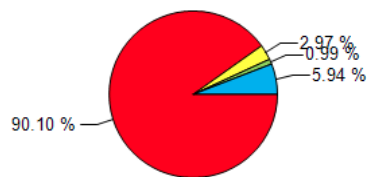
2. Will engaging students in a mathematical study using the Mîkiwahp (tipi) as the foundation through the lens of holistic Indigenous Ways of Knowing result in a **deeper connection to community** and classroom and stronger partnerships as **children see themselves culturally and personally included in the construction of knowledge?**

Purpose, Scope, and Objectives of the Project

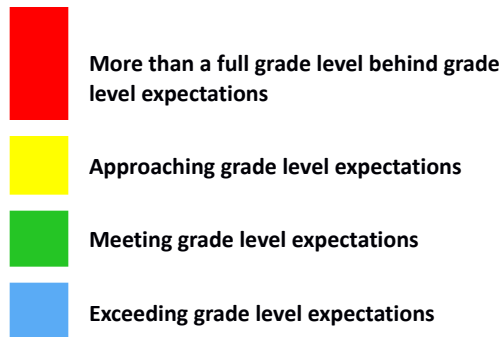


This project represents the collaboration with George Gordon First Nation parents, caregivers, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers as they continue the process of “healing from traumatic colonial experiences ... with love and care for the environment and past and future generations.”(McNab, PhD., n.d.)² Our Indigenous and non-indigenous teachers will grow in their ability to address outcomes through the lens of Indigenous Ways of Knowing.

George Gordon First Nation is located on Treaty Four Territory, Homeland of the Métis. It is home to 3300 Indigenous people. The school at GGFN is a federally funded, but provincially run school, (one of the first of its kind.) It is located on the original site of the George Gordon Residential School.



George Gordon Education Centre students are found among the overwhelming statistics that highlight the struggle within our Eurocentric education system for Indigenous children, with over 90% of students not meeting grade level benchmarks in reading. (Similar statistics are found in writing and math.)



George Gordon Education Centre is a PreK through grade 8 school that serves 218 students residing on the George Gordon First Nation. The school has 12 professional (teaching) staff members and 6.5 paraprofessionals (educational assistants). 78% of the professional and paraprofessional staff are Indigenous - residing close to or on reserve. Horizon School Division has a long-standing positive relationship with George Gordon First Nation Chief and Council. Thus, this school is identified as the primary location for this research project.

² McNab, PhD., M. *History* | *George Gordon First Nation*. George Gordon First Nation. Retrieved 23 March 2021, from <https://ggfn.ca/history/>.

Process:

“We have enough windows and need more mirrors... As Educators of Indigenous Students we are concerned with students not having a strong Identity or knowledge of their background.” (Mîkiwahp Project Team Teachers)

This project began with a consultation with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, as well as families and community members from the Community of George Gordon First Nation. An overview of the purpose and intent of the project was presented and then the group responded with their insights and feedback about the project and what components would be critical to include. They spoke of the necessity to bring their traditional teachings, ceremonies, and language back and to address the holistic needs of children and families who are struggling with the concept and curriculum of school. This includes the negative feelings toward school in the wake of the intergenerational trauma of the residential school system.

A pipe ceremony led by Knowledge Keeper, George GreyBuffalo, launched the project and offered a “Four Circle” teaching that described the important roles of the men, women, children, and Elders. Through that teaching, the teachers and staff were able to see the significance of returning the children to their traditional family through returning to the significant cultural, language, and ceremonial teachings that were lost through the period of residential schools and subsequent trauma.

Assessment:

“If we are to recognise diverse ways of knowing, it is incumbent upon us to find assessment methods that validate this variety,” assert Kirova and Hennig (2013, 106).

Mathematical outcomes will be found within the project, using the Mîkiwahp (Tipi) as the focus within each grade level (i.e. looking at mathematics curricula (for example, grade 7 outcome SS7.1 - Demonstrate an understanding of circles including circumference and central angles).

In this project, students, teachers, and parents/families will attempt to co-construct learning stories to document learning in the George Gordon First Nation Tipi Project. Students and teachers would share their understandings of the learning stories with one another and the wider community. The intent of learning stories is to capture student learning as holistically and authentically as possible through the medicine wheel/circle of courage (see below for examples of how this might be applied - variations will develop as teachers, students, and parents/caregivers co-construct the criteria in each quadrant.)

Teachers will reflect on their own learning through the circle of courage as developed through the consultation process (example below):

Belonging:

I belong in my classroom and school community.
I belong in the community that my school exists on - OR - I recognize my place in this community and my role in the journey toward Truth and Reconciliation.
I have many roles in the classroom - teacher, facilitator, guide, friend, confidante, counsellor.
I respect all who are learning in my classroom.
We are learning together.
I will pass along teachings as they have been shared with me.

Independence:

I am proud of what I am learning and applying to my classroom.
I can achieve my professional learning goals.
I celebrate my learning and the learning of my students in my classroom.
I am in control of my learning journey.



Generosity:

I can celebrate the learning of my colleagues and principal as we journey together.
I can share my learning with my professional community.
I can talk about what I have learned.
I understand and honour my treaty obligations with respect and generosity and strive to better understand the significance of those agreements for the learning of my students.

Mastery:

I understand what I have learned - about myself, mathematics (or other curricula) and my past/culture and/or the culture of my students.
I can talk about my learning - what I know, how I know, and why it matters to me.
I know more about the land, language and culture of myself and/or my students.
I can apply the sacred teachings to my life and my interactions with my students.

Intrinsic to the measurement of success of the project will be the students' own assessment of their holistic learning based on the circle of courage model. How do students perceive themselves as learners and members of the school community when the curriculum reflects their cultural context and values their ways of knowing? A pre-assessment and a post-assessment will be conducted and reflected on by students before, during, and after the project.

Self assessment will be key as **students** view their learning through the circle of courage as developed through the consultation process (example below):

Belonging:

I belong in my classroom.
I belong in my community.
Learning about my community makes me feel connected.
My classroom is part of my community.
I respect others who are learning in my classroom.
We are learning together.

Independence:

I am proud of what I have accomplished.
I can achieve my learning goals.
I am proud of where I am from.
I celebrate my learning and the learning of others in my classroom.
I am in control of my learning journey.
My Elders will be proud of my learning.
My family will be proud of my learning.



Generosity:

I can celebrate the learning of others.
I can share my learning with my community.
I can talk about what I have learned.
I can share my learning with my teachers and my friends.

Mastery:

I understand what I have learned - about myself, mathematics (or other curricula) and my past/culture.
I can talk about my learning - what I know, how I know, and why it matters to me.
I know more about my land, language and culture.
I can apply the sacred teachings to my life.

A **parent/caregiver questionnaire** will be conducted to determine the success of the family consultation and engagement component of the project. This will be similar to the ways in which we ask children and teachers to assess themselves through the circle of courage as developed through the consultation process (example below):

Belonging:

I belong in my child's classroom.
We belong in our community.
My child's classroom reflects the values we have in our family.
I respect other children and families who are learning with my child.
We are learning together and supporting the school community.



Independence:

I am proud of my child's classroom.
I feel welcome and am confident in coming into my child's classroom.
I celebrate my child's learning and the learning of other children in my child's classroom.

Generosity:

I contribute to my child's positive feelings about school.
I am open about the success of my child's teachers with others in my community.
My Elders will be proud of my contribution to my child's learning.
My family will be proud of my contribution to my child's learning.
I can talk about what I have learned about my own culture through the learning of my child.

Mastery:

I understand what I am learning - about myself, and my past/culture and how that impacts my child's identity.
I can talk about my learning - what I know, how I know, and why it matters to me and my family.
I am in control of my learning journey and the path to healing and learning for myself and my children.

Language and culture are key components to the holistic model for this project. These components will come directly from Elders and Knowledge Keepers who will pass along their knowledge through direct interaction with students and teachers/staff.

Upon completion of the project a full report will be created including a Design Framework outlining the process and learning from and through this project; the curricular outcomes achieved; the learning stories of students, teachers, and families; as well as any feedback received during and through the project from stakeholders. The teachings and artifacts that were shared/created through the project will be documented and included as part of the Framework. The project itself will become an exemplar for similar projects to follow. This report and documentation will be shared with the Board of Education and will be incorporated as part of Horizon School Division's Framework for Indigenous Ways of Knowing. These will be shared publicly to the parents and stakeholders of the community. The school will host celebrations with families and community members where students will have the opportunity to share their learning stories and celebrate throughout and at the end of the project.

The final culmination of the project will be the creation of an outdoor classroom (Mikiwahp (Tipi) structure) that will continue to serve the school and community as a space for ongoing land-based learning, ceremony, and celebrations. This model of planning and instruction will be adopted as the exemplar for Indigenous education in this community and other similar communities in Horizon School Division.