



ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOLS

SEPTEMBER 2015

Nominated by:

Horizon School Division #205

for the

2015 Premier's Board of Education Award for Innovation and Excellence in Education

Horizon School Division Board Chair: Jim Hack

Director of Education: Kevin Garinger



Background & Goals

Horizon School Division #205 is guided by three foundational goals set out by our Board of Education. These goals are: to ensure measurable improvement in Pre-K to Grade 12 literacy, to ensure effective assessment practices, and to ensure safe and caring school environments for all students and staff. As we endeavor to realize these goals, substantial efforts have been made to foster and encourage *Culturally Responsive Schools*. By *Culturally Responsive*, we mean that all students, staff, parents/caregivers, community members and educational partners know they are welcome and that their culture is celebrated in our system. This acceptance is foundational to improving student learning outcomes, student engagement and a sense of belonging within the school community.

A number of key initiatives have been undertaken with the guidance and support of Horizon's Board of Education to achieve our *Culturally Responsive Schools* objective:

On December 4, 2014, Horizon principals, Treaty Catalyst Teachers and senior leadership were brought together for a day of discussion aimed at challenging paradigms related to race and privilege.

Beginning in March, 2015, Horizon Board trustees and senior leadership met with First Nations Chiefs and Councils in order to strengthen relationships, engage with community voices and build partnerships. These meetings with Day Star First Nation, Muskowekwan First Nation, George Gordon First Nation and Fishing Lake First Nation have been critical to gaining deeper insights to the views of our community partners as we move forward with our culturally responsive work.



On March 27, in response to a series of racially motivated remarks, a Culturally Responsive Assembly was held at Raymore School. Students from Grades 7 to 12, parents, community members, Horizon senior leadership, Board trustees and representatives from the Ministry of Education enjoyed a morning of presentations aimed at understanding First Nations culture and celebrating cultural differences. Each trustee in attendance also shared their own personal message encouraging cultural acceptance and understanding.

On May 5, 2015, the Horizon Holocaust Symposium was held at William Derby School. This event was made possible by the support of the Board of Education in partnership with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and sponsored by the Azrieli Foundation. This symposium was the first of its kind and brought together 264 students and 47 teachers representing nearly every Horizon school, as well as Horizon Board trustees, senior leadership and



guests. The event featured presentations on topics such as Holocaust history, anti-Semitism and Jewish culture. The highlight of the event was a question and answer session with Holocaust survivors, Adam and Rachel Shtibel, who travelled from their home in Toronto to share their powerful, compelling stories with Horizon students and staff.

A Culturally Responsive module has been created as a professional development component for Horizon staff. The goal of this module is to challenge accepted paradigms about race and shift school culture towards accepting and celebrating individual differences. This module was developed by Horizon staff with help from the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit and in partnership with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. The module will include information from the SHRC's *Citizenship Education* – an important initiative that will support the development of students' citizenship knowledge, skills and practice through curriculum-aligned resource materials at every grade level from Grades 1 to 12. The Culturally Responsive module will be available following a Culturally Responsive Workshop being held on September 30.

Selection Criteria

Evidence of direct Board influence and participation in the innovation:

The Horizon School Division Board of Education is critical to each of these initiatives and to the culturally responsive direction of Horizon schools. In their meetings with First Nations Chiefs and councils, Horizon trustees have established relationships, ensured community voices are heard, and built respect for diverse perspectives. Board trustees were in attendance at the Horizon Holocaust Symposium and the Culturally Responsive Assembly at Raymore School, signaling their commitment to these important conversations. Trustees brought greetings at each of these events, further demonstrating their leadership and support.

Innovative nature of the program or project:

Horizon's *Culturally Responsive Schools* initiative has been the result of a multifaceted approach. Not one single initiative or event, but several. Alignment and integration of these strategies is deliberate, consistently communicating the same message: *Every student contributes to their school community. Their contribution is valued and enhances the classroom, the school discourse and the learning that takes place in Horizon School Division.*

Each initiative or event has been unique. For example, *Citizenship Education*, a program developed by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, is being integrated with the Culturally Responsive Schools module. Partnership with the SHRC also made possible the Horizon Holocaust Symposium, the first educational symposium of its kind. The December 4 meeting with principals gave us an opportunity to challenge school administrators to rethink their own perceptions and paradigms, then take those lessons back to their staff and schools.

Sustainability of the innovation within the present system or school:

The process is deliberately focused on providing information and engaging staff, community and Board Members in dialogue that will cause reflection and sometimes change perspectives. This will change

both paradigms and practice. Furthermore, because this focus is systemic, offering colleagues and students opportunities to interact and learn together, the result will be a sustainable change over time.

Development of the Culturally Responsive Schools module is at the core of this initiative's sustainable change. By engaging principals and teachers in critical dialogue that informs and impacts classroom practice, this module will shift school cultures towards understanding and celebrating individual differences over the long term. Professional development in 2014-2015 focused on principals' underlying perspectives of social "privilege" and the impact this has on student learning.

The key messages communicated in the module are:

- Creating culturally responsive schools is foundational to improving student learning outcomes. It contributes to positive student engagement, a sense of belonging within the school community and is proactive in creating a safe and caring school environment.
- Becoming culturally responsive means rethinking assumptions about the ways we 'do business'. It also means being open to the thinking and worldview of others. Being culturally responsive means actively exploring the knowledge and perspectives that students bring with them to their unique learning experience. Consequently, it is important that we all commit to engaging each student in the learning process by starting from and building on their individual experiential background and culture.

The culturally responsive schools module provides an opportunity for Horizon School Division principals and teachers to:

- Explore the meaning of "culturally responsive school" within the context of Safe and Caring Schools initiatives;
- Experience a facilitation process that they will then use as key school leaders;
- Receive a template of that process so that they can confidently engage their staff in a professional dialogue about "culturally responsive schools".

Cost of the innovation related to benefits achieved:

\$15,000 contract with the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit to develop the Culturally Responsive module, which will be available in the 2015-2016 school year.

\$12,000 expenses for the Holocaust Symposium, off-set by registration fees, donations and sponsorships.

\$2,700 for the December 4 Culturally Responsive day with principals discussing race and privilege. This includes the meal, mileage and facility rental.

These efforts are aimed at encouraging staff, students and community members to reassess their paradigms around race and culture. As a result, the benefits to student engagement, sense of belonging and cultural understanding are far-reaching and will be felt for many years to come.

Client support for innovation:

The work is a direct response to the voices of our community:

In the past, Chief Longman of George Gordon First Nation asked for evidence of what Horizon School Division was doing to address racism. In many ways, the work towards *Culturally Responsive Schools* has been an answer to that question.

Feedback following the Horizon Holocaust Symposium:

“I personally want to express my gratitude to the Horizon Board of Education for their unwavering support and their vision in that they clearly understand how this kind of an event helps to promote literacy, anti-oppressive thinking, and responsible and active citizenship, ultimately supporting Horizon’s publicly stated goal of providing Safe and Caring Schools.” – Larry Mikulcik, William Derby School teacher and Event Chairperson for the Horizon Holocaust Symposium.

“My students all agree it was a life changing experience to listen to Mr. and Mrs. Shtibel and their testimony. We will forever be grateful to you for taking your vision and organizing and hosting the symposium.” – Kristen Loeffelholz, teacher at Wakaw School, referring to the Horizon Holocaust Symposium.

Partnerships in Support of the Innovation:

First Nations Chiefs and Councils: First Nations Chiefs and Councils have engaged with Horizon senior leadership and trustees regarding how to improve education outcomes for their communities. First Nations partners have shown their support for these initiatives through their willingness to speak with students and have Elders share opening prayers at events.

Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission: The SHRC has provided critical support and partnership for a number of *Culturally Responsive* initiatives in Horizon schools. Judge David Arnot, Chief Commissioner of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, spoke at the Horizon Holocaust Symposium on the role of the Commission, Human Rights, and post-1945 human rights infringements and genocide. The SHRC is also offering their support through their involvement with the *Culturally Responsive* module.

Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit: Along with Horizon staff and senior leadership, the SPDU helped to develop the *Culturally Responsive* module that will be shared with staff during the 2015-2016 school year.

Ministry of Education: Te Kotahitanga research, based in New Zealand, indicates that culturally responsive schools see increased student engagement and improved achievement outcomes. This research provided the basis for the Government of Saskatchewan’s *Following Their Voices* program, which engages students, teachers and First Nations Elders in feedback related to improved student engagement and offers training to teachers and principals relating to culturally responsive schools. Horizon School Division is pleased to have a school, Raymore School, taking part in Phase One of this initiative. The feedback received will help guide the education sector to provide better student engagement for all schools, and the Horizon Board was integral in supporting Raymore School’s involvement in this important work.

Evidence of improved student achievement:

Evidence of improved student achievement can be found in student responses in the *Tell Them From Me* survey from the 2014-2015 school year and by comparing average final marks and on-time graduation rates between 2013-2014 and 2014-2015.

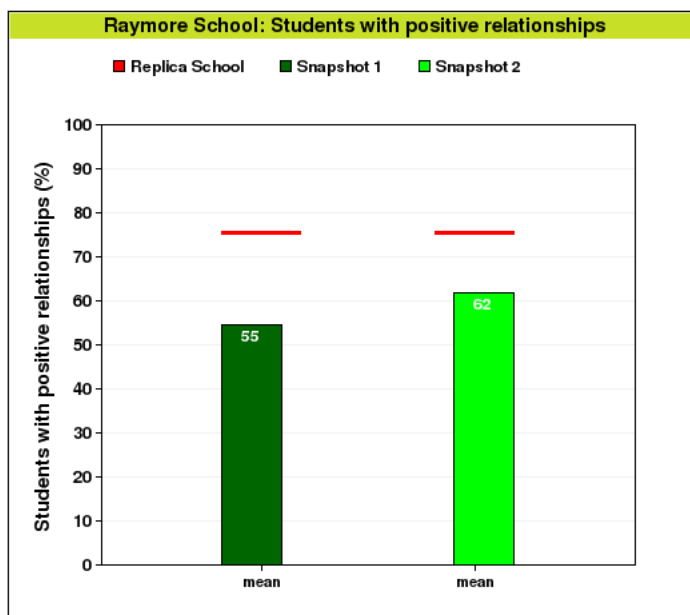
SchoolName	Division Average		Canadian Average		Division Average		Canadian Average	
	Elementary		Elementary		Secondary		Secondary	
SchoolType								
Season	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
Year	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
Students with a positive sense of belonging	85%	84%	86%	86%	72%	73%	71%	71%
Students with positive relationships	81%	82%	80%	80%	70%	69%	76%	76%
Students who are victims of bullying	28%	27%	26%	26%	20%	20%	22%	22%
Feel Safe Attending this School	70%	75%	87%	68%	73%	73%	85%	65%
Advocacy at School	67%	68%	49%	49%	37%	36%	27%	27%
Positive Teacher-Student Relations	86%	84%	79%	79%	67%	65%	60%	60%
Positive learning climate	71%	70%	74%	74%	65%	64%	59%	59%
Effective Learning Time	81%	82%	81%	81%	69%	69%	65%	65%
Relevance	79%	82%	79%	79%	65%	64%	60%	60%
Rigor	83%	83%	79%	79%	67%	67%	N/A	N/A
Expectations for Success	88%	88%	87%	87%	75%	74%	71%	71%
Students planning to finish high school	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	78%	80%	82%	82%

The *Tell Them From Me* results found above indicate that a large number of Horizon students in both elementary and secondary schools felt a positive sense of belonging compared to the national average.

Positive Relationships in Raymore School

Snapshot 1 – Fall 2014

Snapshot 2 – Spring 2015

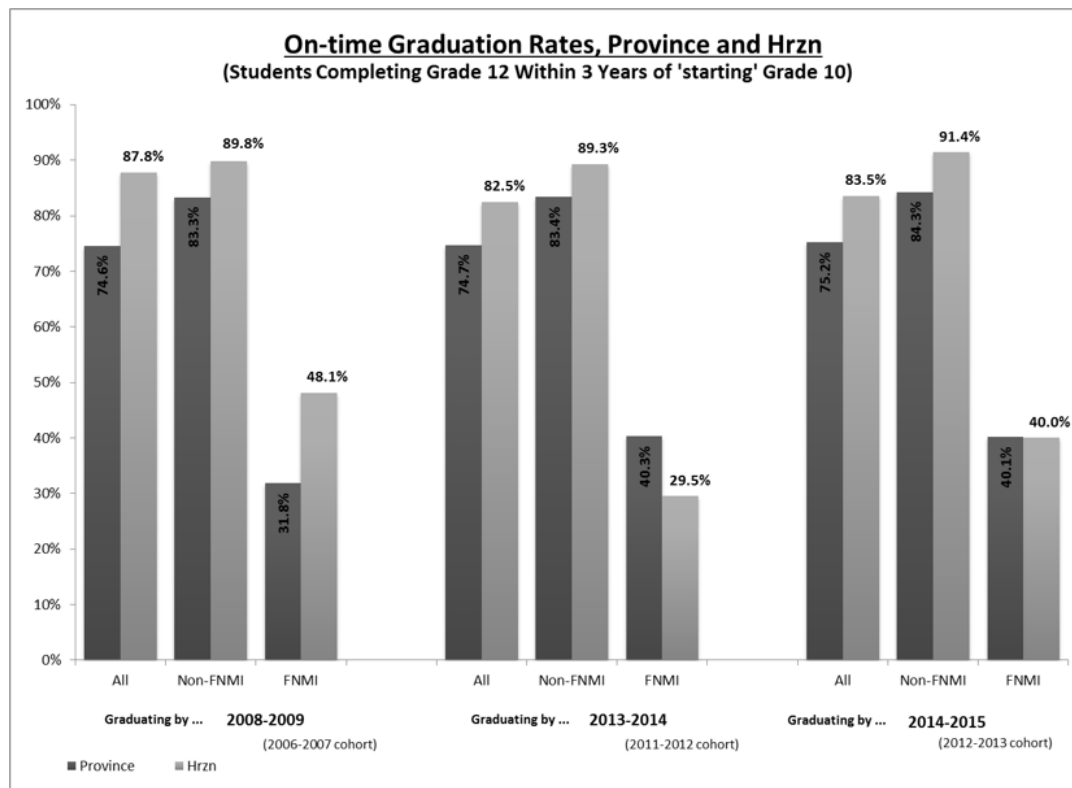


The graph to the left shows that students at Raymore School identified themselves as having more positive relationships (62%) on the Spring *Tell Them From Me* survey than those who identified as having positive relationships in the Fall survey (55%).

In 5 out of 8 courses selected to highlight average final marks for the 2014-2015 school year, FNMI students' average marks improved over 2013-2014, as indicated in the tables found below.

Average Final Marks in Selected Secondary-Level Courses 2013-14						
Subject	All Students		Non-FNMI		FNMI	
	Province	Horizon SD	Province	Horizon SD	Province	Horizon SD
English Language Arts A 10	72.0	73.9	74.9	76.5	60.2	54.2
English Language Arts B 10	71.7	75.4	74.6	78.3	59.5	52.9
Science 10	70.6	73.5	73.9	76.5	57.1	54.5
Math: Workplace and Apprenticeship 10	71.1	74.5	74.6	78.2	57.8	49.6
Math: Foundations and Pre-calculus 10	70.7	73.2	72.9	74.2	58.5	56.9
English Language Arts 20	73.0	73.8	74.9	76.5	63.3	51.2
Math: Workplace and Apprenticeship 20	66.9	67.4	69.6	71.9	59.5	48.0
Math: Foundations 20	72.6	77.2	74.2	77.3	63.5	nr

Average Final Marks in Selected Secondary-Level Courses 2014-15						
Subject	All Students		Non-FNMI		FNMI	
	Province	Horizon SD	Province	Horizon SD	Province	Horizon SD
English Language Arts A 10	72.4	75.5	75.1	78.5	61.5	57.2
English Language Arts B 10	72.7	75.3	75.2	79.0	61.7	52.4
Science 10	71.2	75.1	74.1	79.0	59.7	51.0
Math: Workplace and Apprenticeship 10	71.3	76.7	74.6	79.7	59.2	55.3
Math: Foundations and Pre-calculus 10	71.3	72.9	73.2	75.1	60.5	51.0
English Language Arts 20	73.4	76.9	75.1	78.3	64.4	63.8
Math: Workplace and Apprenticeship 20	67.2	69.9	69.3	71.8	62.0	61.5
Math: Foundations 20	72.3	75.4	73.8	76.1	64.4	62.3



On-time graduation rates for FNMI students rose to 40% in 2014-2015, up from 29.5% the previous year.

As the Culturally Responsive Schools module will be implemented moving forward in 2015-2016, data has not yet been collected regarding its impact. The metrics used to measure the success of this module will be the *Tell Them From Me* survey. Increased student engagement through this module will also be indicated through improved reading levels and graduation rates in the years to come.

Conclusion

Horizon School Division's focus on *Culturally Responsive Schools* is an effort to realize the goals of our Board: improved literacy, assessment and safe and caring schools. By ensuring that students have a sense of belonging and a sense that their culture is celebrated, we see increased student engagement. This leads to improved reading levels and, ultimately, increased graduation rates. This is not an initiative aimed at one particular segment of the student population, rather it is inclusive of all students and cultures. Without the support of our community and First Nations partners and organizations like the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit and the Ministry of Education, these initiatives and events would not be possible. All of this, however, stems from the guidance and support we have received from our Board of Education, whose dedication to cultural understanding and a celebration of what makes us unique sets the tone for our vast division.