

Urban Aboriginal Education Project

Interim Report as at September 30, 2009

Name of Board: Toronto District School Board

Term of Agreement: September 26, 2008 to June 2010

Interim Reporting Deadline: September 30, 2009

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Urban Aboriginal Education Project of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) funded by the Ministry of Education from September 26, 2008 to June 30, 2011.

This project entails the development and implementation of an urban Aboriginal education model for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, family and community engagement, specifically in the context of the TDSB.

As outlined in the proposal submitted to the Ministry of Education on September 15, 2008, the project has been organized into five key areas:

- Student Support;
- Partnerships;
- Community Engagement;
- Curriculum; and
- Professional Development.

A key accomplishment made possible by the extension of the project has been the formation of a full staff team for the TDSB Aboriginal Education Centre. As of September 1, 2009 the following staff positions are now in place through the funding of the Urban Aboriginal Education Project:

- 0.5 Project Co-ordinator
- 2 Student Success Teachers
- 1 Additional Community Liaison Worker
- 1 Child and Youth Counsellor

In addition, we are in the process of hiring:

- An additional Child and Youth Counsellor
- A Mentoring Co-ordinator (jointly funded by this project and other sources)

The above staff joins the TDSB funded staff (below) of the Aboriginal Education Centre to implement the new work outlined in the Urban Aboriginal Education Project proposal enriching and expanding the existing work of the centre:

- 1 Central Co-ordinating Principal
- 1 Instructional Leader, Aboriginal Education

- 1 Community Liaison Worker
- 1 Office Assistant

It is this combined staff team that impacts the quality of the work, focusing on sustainable change in the system. Their work weaves through all the activities of the project.

In this time period, the development of written and online materials for students, parents and educators, the development of a referral system and participation in system-wide professional development opportunities and partnerships has raised the profile and visibility of our staff and resources and created interest in and demand for our services.

Update on the TDSB Urban Aboriginal Education Project as of September 30, 2009.

STUDENT SUPPORT

Student Support is the focus of all that we do. However our work in the following areas supports individual students directly:

- A referral process has been developed and advertised to the system via multiple approaches, enabling schools, teachers and parents to access our staff.
- 2 Itinerant Student Success Teachers – Aboriginal Education have now been hired to provide intensive 1:1 academic support for Aboriginal students referred for assistance (e.g. literacy support and/or enrichment) and to provide programming support to staff who work with First Nation, Métis and Inuit students in TDSB. The team is now able to meet needs across the city in elementary and secondary settings. Demand has increased dramatically since February 2009 to the beginning of September 2009. We are now working in more than 75 schools.
- Our existing Child and Youth Counsellor – Aboriginal Education continues to provide support to First Nation, Métis and Inuit students through advocacy, assistance with attendance issues, individual and group counselling, etc. Support for youth to find and stay in summer employment, in partnership with the TDSB Focus on Youth program, resulted in a number of youth coming through the summer with confidence and a renewed desire to be successful in school. Support continues in transitioning them to the appropriate school programs. Hiring is underway for the second Child and Youth Counsellor position.
- A university credit course is being offered for the first time in conjunction with York University for Grade 11 and 12 high school students. This course, *Aboriginal People, Identity and Education* currently has 16 Aboriginal students from 8 secondary schools enrolled. Tuition, textbooks and other expenses are covered by the Urban Aboriginal Education Project.

- In addition to the financial and staff support offered for the above University Course, financial assistance has been available to a number of students. This assistance ranges from awards, for writing and artwork competitions to assistance with transportation costs, textbooks and other school supplies, health needs (e.g. glasses) and emergency assistance including food.
- Creation of a work space for students at the Aboriginal Education Centre currently includes space, food, teacher support and access to computers 2 afternoons a week with plans for expansion.
- Anishinaabe Language and Cultural Immersion Camp: to support students in their knowledge of Ojibwe language and Aboriginal cultures, a 4 day camp was held at the Toronto Island Natural Science School. The planning around this camp also fostered the development of curriculum connections and brought Aboriginal Education Centre staff together with school staff. It was an opportunity to bring Aboriginal students together from across the TDSB. 60 students from 18 schools attended this camp. Our staff team is maintaining ongoing involvement with many of these students and families.
- Our Community Liaison Workers are pursuing partners in the business community (e.g. KPMG – audit · tax · advisory), who wish to partner in mentoring programs.
- A Restorative Justice task force is actively looking at models for restorative justice work in the TDSB.

PARTNERSHIPS

- In collaboration with the TDSB Aboriginal Education Centre, Native Earth Performing Arts wrote and produced a play, Takin' Pride to address issues of stereotyping through the subject of school logos. The play has been performed for students and members of the wider Aboriginal community and continues to be in demand as a compelling vehicle through which to address issues of racism and stereotyping.
- *Kitchi-nakmigan*, an Arts Based Project for students in Grades 4 – 12, was developed through the Urban Aboriginal Education Project as a partnership between the Aboriginal Education Centre, schools and Aboriginal artists. This project afforded the opportunity to release and educate teachers, bring Aboriginal artists into the schools as partners and culminate the project in June in a visual arts and performance event and 3-week exhibit. This resulted in exceptional student work, growth in understanding and great interest and participation from schools and community. The partnership included the Aboriginal Peacekeeping Unit of the Toronto Police Services. Art was displayed at Police Headquarters and became part of their National Aboriginal Day ceremony.

- Association for Native Development in the Performing and Visual Arts (ANDPVA) has partnered with the TDSB to continue bringing Aboriginal artists into the schools in the 2009/2010 year with the support of the Urban Aboriginal Education Project.
- The *Gaadibaatjimat Ngaashi* (Stay in School) Program in conjunction with Red Pepper Spectacle Arts continued until the end of June at the First Nations School of Toronto, offering students theatre arts, dance, puppetry, spoken word and visual arts activities.
- Miziwe Biik provides the Aboriginal Community in Toronto with training and employment services and is the Urban Aboriginal Education Project's partner in this Student Mentorship Initiative. Challenges in aligning employment practices, etc. have been met and overcome and hiring is proceeding for the very important Coordinator's position. This initiative will match post secondary Aboriginal students with First Nation, Métis and Inuit students in TDSB schools and will incorporate E-Learning, on line support forums and excursions.
- Young Women's Circles continued to meet at the First Nations School of Toronto to end of June.
- Other projects are being developed in partnership with organizations such as the Museum of Inuit Art, and Seventh Generation Image Makers.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- The hiring of a second Community Liaison Worker has increased the Project's capacity in developing and strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal organizations and communities.
- Development of the TDSB Aboriginal Education website by our staff has enhanced community ability to connect with us and get valuable information on cultural events, procedures, schools and resources.
- Development of a database including parents and community members is ongoing, to enhance our networking.
- A series of community events has been initiated with the Aboriginal Community Advisory Committee to bring community members together around performing arts, speakers, films etc. The first community event was a performance of '*Takin' Pride*'.
- The continued development of the TDSB Brockton Equity Centre (including signage, decoration, a medicine garden, etc.) has created usable attractive community spaces for the Aboriginal community to meet.

- Aboriginal Elders/Seniors have been engaged in a Literacy Project to read with students in two schools with significant First Nation, Métis and Inuit populations. This project continues to be supported and expanded this year.
- Debwewin, the Aboriginal Youth Leadership program continues to support students in leadership development. Youth have also been guided in summer employment, school transitions, cultural teachings and continue to meet as a group and expand. Debwewin youth also took on leadership roles in the May Language and Cultural Immersion Camp for Grades 4 – 6 Aboriginal students and were supported to do so.
- Development of lunch and breakfast programming for students includes a girls' group at Eastview Jr. P. S. incorporating teachings, guidance, nutrition and literacy.
- Organizational and financial support was provided for a visit by Nunavut artists and students to TDSB schools in May 2009.

CURRICULUM

- Resource guides and teaching materials continue to be prepared and revised for activities such as Aboriginal Education month, Louis Riel Day, Aboriginal Veteran's Day and National Aboriginal Day.
- Contribution of Aboriginal content to Board publications and websites, e.g. Days of Significance continues.
- Secondary curriculum writing continued over the summer, to be completed and field tested within this school year.
- *Aboriginal Voices in the Curriculum* continues to be shared across the system as a core elementary resource in Aboriginal Education. This is done both through professional development and online.
- Large-scale purchases of curriculum and professional resources have taken place. The Aboriginal Education Centre Library has been created. Developments of kits for all grades and maintenance of a lending library for teachers is moving ahead. Aboriginal curriculum resources, professional resources for teachers and staff-created materials are being made available to schools and teachers through professional development and online through the website.
- Through the Arts Based Project, *Kitchi-nakmigan*, curriculum lessons and units have been developed in the Arts and are being shared through an online Aboriginal Arts Conference.

- Further staff support through the hiring of a part-time curriculum consultant is being pursued.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Targeted Professional Development allowed us to address summer institutes of new teachers, elementary and secondary teachers and new administrators before this school year started. The focus was to give them accurate and compelling information on the Aboriginal community and describe the staff and resources that are available to them both in working with Aboriginal students and in infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum.
- The Arts Based Professional Learning Community (PLC) continues. Project contributions to the maintenance of this PLC include release time, space and facilitation for meeting.
- Continuation of the Native Languages, Cultures and Traditions PLC is supported in part through provision of release time, professional resources, space, and facilitation for meeting.
- Development of Cultural and Language Immersion Camp programming by PLC including language and cultural teachers, classroom teachers and Aboriginal Education Centre staff.
- As part of Mentorship and Leadership opportunities for Aboriginal staff, a 6-week leadership session was completed including Aboriginal and visible minority staff.
- In school Professional Development for requesting schools continues regularly.
- Support through release time for Professional Development was provided in schools with significant numbers of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students.

Summary

A number of general observations at this time in the project:

- The capacity to effectively implement the TDSB Urban Aboriginal Education Project has increased dramatically both with the addition of staff and the increased timelines for implementation.
- The management of the project requires an understanding of and flexibility with implementation. This is the case when initiating new projects which “take off” with great enthusiasm as a result of effective planning and launching. This requires

flexibility on behalf of the team to redirect resources and energies, sometimes temporarily at the expense of others.

- Management of a number of new staff requires a redefinition of the work of existing staff which can in the short term cause work overload while the work is redistributed and supervisory routines established.
- While recruitment and hiring has at times been difficult, increasingly there has been a greater interest in and awareness of these positions and the existence of the project in our system and community. More recent hirings have had many more qualified applicants than the initial postings did.
- While we continue to take a large amount of time and consultation to work through any modifications to existing employment practices, there has been movement in and greater understanding of the need to do so. These modifications have been absolutely essential with a number of the positions in the project.
- Flexibility to refine the scope and sequence in some of the initiatives has been essential in the success and relevance of the activities.
- Connecting with other Board Initiatives and Departments, e.g. Student Success, Safe and Caring Schools, Equity, Guidance, Program and Student Services is a key direction throughout the work of the project. Our capacity to bring awareness of Aboriginal perspectives and solid knowledge of supports, strategies and resources for people to work with in all these areas will help sustain the accomplishments of the Urban Aboriginal Education Project.

REVISED WORK PLAN FOR 2009-2010

- Introductory System Wide Professional Development – **September /October**
- Roll out of pamphlet and referral form to the system for Aboriginal Education Centre services – **September/October**
- Contact with all schools currently serviced – **September**
- Continued contact with current students – **All year**
- Referral and work with new students and families – **All Year**
- Development of work plan for schools with significant First Nations, Métis and Inuit populations – **September/October**
- Design and participate in system wide training for Student Success Teams – **October/November**
- Professional Development, Best Practices, for Administrators through Families of Schools – **January to April**
- Support for transitions for Aboriginal youth changing schools or entering TDSB - from reserve or other communities – **All year**
- Hiring of second Child and Youth Counsellor – **October**
- Support for University Credit Course for High School Students – **September to December**
- Task force meetings on restorative justice **September to December**
- Establish post secondary Connections including practicum placements for preservice students - **All year**
- Partnership with Council Fire to establish youth activities – **September/October**
- Hire co-ordinator and begin mentorship program with Miziwe-Biik – **September/October. Program to continue all year.**
- Support Gaadibaatjimat Ngaashi - Stay in School program – **All Year**
- Continue and expand work with Debwewin – **All Year**
- Youth Leadership Camp – **December**
- Development of kits for all grades – **October to April**
- Review and field testing of Secondary Curriculum – **October to March**
- Development of working Lending Library of Resources – **October to March**
- Continued development of website – **All year**
- Build Native Languages Professional Learning Community – **All year**
- Leadership/Mentorship Program for Aboriginal Staff – **November to April**
- Systematize Scholarship and Bursary program. Locate other sources – **All year**
- Positive Role Model speaker series – **November to May**
- Partnership with ANDVPA. Aboriginal Artists in the Schools – **All Year**
- Monthly Parent Community Evenings – **November to June**
- Literacy based Breakfast and Lunch Programs – **October to June**
- Language and Cultural Immersion Camp, Grades 5 and 6 – **May**
- Create opportunities to showcase student work – **All year, with highlights in November and June**