

ISD Hutterian Schools 2018-19

School Improvement Plan

Report to Community

Every year, the ISD Hutterian Schools come together to create a School Improvement Plan that will help staff focus on specific ways to improve student achievement. Our plans stem from specific areas, some of which match the ISD Divisional Continuous Improvement Plan areas of focus, but also from school-based areas of concern. Our over-riding goal always remains the same, however; to not just teach our students *skills*, but to help them become better at *learning*, in general.

When reflecting on growth for the year, and in setting goals for the next year, statistics and evidence from all ISD Hutterian Schools are considered as one group. Individual school data may differ somewhat from the larger group, but it is very difficult to collect data for very small groups. For that reason, growth is measured for the group as a whole.

- **Where We Were in June 2018**

Data from 2017-18 indicated that the majority of our students are fluent readers by the end of grade 4, but are challenged when it comes to fully comprehending and thinking critically about the texts they read. Through the explicit teaching of reading strategies, we saw notable growth in their understanding of how to use specific reading strategies to help them make meaning of what they read, at a basic level. Our focus for 2018-19 would need to include more work on deeper comprehension and analysis of texts for our students to fully understand and construct meaning of the material they interact with.

Effective communication, both written and oral, is still developing for most students. We felt our students, as second language learners who live in closed communities, required more purpose and relevance for their writing, as well as more opportunity to share and celebrate their growth as writers and as communicators, in general. We also recognized that Kindergarten students and their families were receiving some literacy readiness information and activities at registration, but that they required more exposure to English and practice with pre-literacy skills prior to entering school.

- **How We Addressed These Needs**

Teachers focused on providing explicit instruction on the use of two strategies -Close Reading and Annotating Texts (gr. 4-9)- as tools to improve comprehension and analysis of reading material across subject areas. Teachers participated in professional development sessions to specifically learn how to instruct and use these strategies with students.

We also provided authentic writing experiences (personal writing, writing to communicate ideas and information, literary writing) where the purpose and the context was meaningful for students, and we gave them criteria and exemplars as models and support for them to help themselves improve their self-assessment. Following professional learning on strategies for student self-assessment, teachers focused on explicit instruction in the methods of Public Conferencing and Peer Conferencing, and used these methods with students to improve their abilities to give meaningful feedback to each other about their writing communication of ideas. Finally, we offered regular opportunities within the school for parents and communities to come and share in the students' presentations of their writing and communicating work.

- **Where We are Now**

Pre-school as well as early literacy presentations were provided for all parents at fall open house gatherings, along with ideas and resources for working at home with children on reading and literacy skills. This information was well received, but has had varying degrees of impact across our communities. We will continue to convey information and encouragement to parents around how they can best support literacy skills from the home front, and monitor the impact it has on student achievement over time. We will also keep encouraging parents to attend school-organized opportunities to hear their children formally present their writing and speaking creations, as having an audience brings purpose to their learning in these areas.

Teachers have made significant growth in their understanding and execution of best practices in literacy instruction, and students are beginning to apply the methods and strategies we are teaching when they approach comprehension, analysis and communication tasks. Reflecting on the data from the RAD, PM, Benchmarks, Cold Writes, the Grade 12 provincial ELA exam and other school-based assessments, we recognize that students understand the process of the strategies, but need more practice to use them for critical thinking and analysis skills to deepen. These skills are crucial to making sense of text, making connections, and communicating ideas about what is being read.

- **What's Next**

Teachers and students have worked hard to put in place the building blocks that contribute to literacy development. Now what we need is time to practice! While we will not have a formal literacy focus in the 2019-20 school year, students and teachers will continue working on the skills and strategies introduced this school year. We feel confident that consistent use and support with the best practice strategies we have focused on this year will contribute greatly to the learning gains that we have already begun to see!

LITERACY

NUMERACY

- **Where We Were In June 2018**

Throughout the 2017-18 school year, we were working to strengthen students' competency in verbalizing their understanding of math concepts and problems through the use of daily Math Talks and encouraging them to explain their own thinking as well as the thinking of work done by classmates. Some progress is evident with simple concepts, but more complex concepts remain challenging. Solving written word problems is also a challenge. We recognized that students lacked the conceptual understanding of mathematics in many areas, and were relying simply on their ability to recall procedures, with limited success. This was also evident in their lack of fluency with basic math facts, with few students being able to master this foundational component of numeracy. As a result, our data indicated that a significant portion of our students were not meeting grade level expectations. We also recognized that teachers needed support to make the shift from teaching math, for the most part, at the procedural level, to providing instruction that deepened understanding at a conceptual level.

There was also evidence that students did not see the value in numeracy learning, or had little belief in their ability as numeracy learners. Our challenge was to find what made math relevant and meaningful to our students so they would understand the importance of becoming 'numerate'.

- **How We Addressed These Needs**

Our approach to addressing the gaps in conceptual understanding that our students were experiencing was to ensure we were starting at the right place for them. We used initial assessment information to tell us where to begin our teaching, which was not always associated with a student's age or grade level. For some students, this meant additional support from our resource teacher, but for most students, needs were addressed in the classroom. Teachers began to implement a Guided Math structure in their classes, to make sure that students were receiving direct instruction on a routine basis, and ample time to practice. Teachers also began to introduce problem solving tasks that challenged students to think deeply, use what they knew about math and numbers, and explain their thinking about the answers they arrived at. These "rich tasks" require and build conceptual understanding, and were at the centre of teacher professional development this year. Teachers spent four half days learning about the value of these types of tasks, and how to use them with students. Later in the year, teachers began to connect some of these rich tasks to colony jobs and activities in an effort to make the math relevant for the students. Fact fluency was also a topic of teacher professional learning this year, with a focus on learning the best way to help students learn and retain basic math facts.

- **Where We Are Now**

Students are beginning to develop a comfort level with a conceptual approach to numeracy learning. They appear more comfortable collaborating, sharing ideas, and looking critically at their own work and others to deepen understanding. They are noticeably more engaged in math when it is directly connected to their life and community. We had hoped more parents and community members would be willing to come to school and talk with students specifically about the math in their daily work, but it wasn't in everyone's comfort zone. Taking the students to the math, by visiting different areas of the community or specific job sites, became a very successful alternative for us. Still, we hope that parents and community members will start to feel more comfortable talking with the students about the importance of math in their world, and supporting students with some necessary home practice as they try to develop their fact fluency skills. Information on many games and activities that can be done with children at home was distributed at every open house in the fall. These games will help reinforce concepts taught at school, and can make a real difference in student achievement. Our students continue to lag behind with math facts and understanding math vocabulary. Every little bit they can practice at home will make a difference!

- **What's Next**

Numeracy remains a focus for us next year, both at the Division and the school level. Teachers will continue to learn about how to plan for stronger guided math programs and implement rich, conceptual-based numeracy programs through multiple professional learning sessions. Students will continue to work on developing their fact fluency, growing their math vocabulary, and deepening their conceptual understanding through rich tasks. As well, we will look to find more ways to connect math to colony life, and to support parents with resources and information to help them highlight these connections and practice skills at home. We hope that a combination of these things will contribute to increased student belief in themselves as numerate people, and in their numeracy achievement overall.

WELLNESS

- **Where We were in June 2018**

Wellness is a new focus area this year, but it encompasses many of the needs we addressed under other titles in previous school plans, such as Positive, Respectful learning Environments. The Wellness focus, however, also includes things like personal and physical safety and social-emotional needs of students and staff, both inside and outside of school. In 2017-18, schools focused on creating a positive, respectful, learning environment in the classroom and school, where students and staff feel safe and valued. We made gains in this area, but our data and observations led us to further consider the physical, social, and emotional needs of our students. We have, for sometime time now, recognized the need for our students and communities to understand both positive mental health practices, and mental health issues that impact, learning, relationships, and day to day well being. As we looked ahead to 2018-19, providing education and support in these areas, as well as addressing the physical safety needs of students and the community came to the forefront of our planning.

- **How We addressed These Needs**

Teachers and guidance counsellors worked together to implement the Zones of Regulation strategies to encourage self-regulation practices to all K-8 students. This program teaches students to recognize when they are emotionally ready to learn and focus, and how to regulate themselves in times of distraction, anger, or other feelings that can interfere with learning. We continued to look at the impact of the physical environment and make changes to positively effect student learning. Teachers participated in professional learning that focused on creating a self-regulated classroom, and began to implement some of its components. Guidance lessons using the Mind Up curriculum were used with students in grades 1-8, and high school students participated in sessions on dealing with stress and anxiety. High School teachers and guidance staff also participated in Divisional wellness training to help them better understand student needs in these areas. In the area of physical safety, we planned for specialized training programs in each school to ensure our students were exposed to how to provide care for younger children in their charge, or, in the case of high school students, how to respond in an emergency.

- **Where We Are now**

With regard to physical safety, high school students are trained in first aid and CPR (or will be by October 2020) and are better prepared to help in case of accident or health emergency. They have all received drug and alcohol awareness workshops this year, as well. Our grade 4-9 students have all completed the Red Cross Babysitting course, making them aware of general safety practices at school, home, on the colony, and while caring for children.

Our students are showing some awareness of how to self-regulate for learning and are making progress toward having a calmer, more focused and engaged attitude toward learning. Teachers are feeling more confident with teaching and reinforcing self-regulation strategies with students, and are beginning to understand what the foundations of self-regulated learning are all about.

Our observations and discussions with students and parents tell us that students are still struggling to open up about stress and negative influences on their wellness. Teachers are also feeling that they need further training in recognizing and addressing mental health issues amongst students. Some students lack self-confidence, or 'efficacy' about their abilities as learners and this is having a negative impact on learning and their mental health. One area that we recognize needs our immediate attention is online safety. We see our students as vulnerable in this environment, and are concerned for their personal safety.

- **What's Next**

We will continue to provide education and support to our students and communities around positive mental health practices, as well as coping strategies to deal with grief in its many forms. As well, our high school and guidance staff will continue their training to support the well being of students. Personal safety education, online and otherwise, will be planned in consultation with school social workers, guidance staff, and colony communities.

Learner well-being will be another area we look at. Our hope is that through improved assessment practices, we can foster our students' belief in themselves as learners, curb their anxiety in tackling difficult tasks, and improve their overall engagement in school.

Thank you to all parents and communities for your support and interest in your children's education. We value our relationship with you as partners in their success in school, and in their communities. We look forward to seeing all parents and interested community members at your school's open house in September!

Sincerely,

The Interlake School Division Hutterian Education Team