

Exemplary Strategies/Programs/Practices to Support Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights in School Boards



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

School Board: Rainy River District School Board

Contact Person and Email Address: Kim Kirk, Indigenous Education Leader, kim.kirk@rrdsb.com

Name of Program/Initiative/Strategy: *Ask a Knowledge Keeper Sessions*

Hyperlinks to Documents or Website(s) Describing this Program/Initiative/Strategy:

<https://sites.google.com/gapps.rrdsb.com/rrdsb-indigenous-education/home>

http://portal.rrdsb.com/indigenous_ed.html

Description of Program/Initiative/Strategy

The focus is on exemplary strategies/programs that increase student confidence, achievement, engagement and retention and reduce systemic barriers. In the brief description below please provide answers to the following questions: Where the program/initiative/strategy is delivered (school/board locations)? Who is responsible for delivering and monitoring the program/initiative/strategy? Who is the target audience? Are there any community partnerships involved? Are there any staffing or budget implications? Are there any special resources required? What are your indicators of success, etc.?

Our *Ask a Knowledge Keeper Program*, initiated by Kim Kirk, Indigenous Education Leader, connects students in the classroom with First Nations Elders in a virtual space allowing open dialogue and sharing of cultural teachings and practices. Through four one hour sessions (once a week for 4 weeks), students and elders interact through Zoom calls facilitated by Kim Kirk. Topics include Tobacco, Hunting/Trapping, Life as a Child (Living completely off the land), Fall activities, clans and ice fishing.

Students lead the discussion through the creation of individual questions prior to meeting. These are shared with our elders beforehand to guide the discussion and so our elders can smoke the pipe or ask for guidance if needed. Students are actively engaged with their class as they take turns asking their questions and listening to the elders share their teachings and lived experiences.

With the changes in Covid-19 restrictions, we are now meeting in person with the knowledge keepers which provides an extraordinarily rich learning opportunity for our students. Secondly, these sessions create the opportunity for relationships to be fostered building capacity at the schools.

What has been the impact on student learning, retention and engagement? Please share any data to support impact.

Students are actively engaged through the creation of questions for our elders and listening during the sessions. One educator commented, “Kelvin has many insights on life and circumstances that are important for students and staff to reflect upon. The more that knowledge is shared, the more we can all learn about the past, present, and future and make positive changes in the world.”

Data:

Approximately 25 classes across the district have participated in a total of 87 sessions. Each session is one hour. February and March, 2022, the sessions were open to any classes whereas in November, December, 2021, and January 2022, the sessions were one on one with specific classrooms. April has moved to in-person sessions with valuable teachings on the drum, pipe and ceremony being offered to students as these were not teachings that could be offered online.