



Ghùch Tlá Community School Review Report May 2016

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School Principal: Cynthia Wagner

Date of Review: May 24/25, 2016

School Review Team:

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Bob Walker, School Council Liaison, Yukon Education

Meetings with the School included:

- Students
- Teachers
- School Administration
- CTFN Elder
- School Council representatives

School Context

Ghùch Tlâ Community School is nestled in the southern lakes region of the Yukon approximately 1 hour south of Whitehorse. Approximately 40 children from the Carcross/Tagish area attend the school. The primary aim at Ghùch Tlâ Community School is to provide a positive learning environment that encourages a child to grow intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically to the best of his/her ability.

The mission of Ghùch Tlâ Community School states that it is committed to educating the whole child through the provision of a healthy, positive atmosphere that promotes and reinforces the community virtues and values such as: respect, self-discipline, cooperation, leadership development, and a sense of community.

Ghùch Tlâ Community School recognizes the importance of the collective role in developing within students the foundations for later learning and holds high expectations for individual student achievement. Staff work as a team to provide students with the best opportunities possible, respecting the various needs and different learning styles of students. This is founded on the belief that education is a partnership of home, school, and community and welcomes community members into our school as part of our learning community.

Norms and Culture:

Characteristics:

Continuously improving schools are socially and culturally inclusive with high expectations for each learner. A focus on continuous improvement is evident.

Observations of the Team:

- The team observed a staff that is supportive, flexible, and helpful to each other and employs a caring approach towards working with their students. This has been important given that there have been transitions in school administration and teaching staff this year. Staff shared with the team that First Nations staff members help non-First Nations staff to better understand local culture and traditions
- A First Nations Elder works in the school daily for a half-day in the Native Language classroom. The consistent presence of a respected Elder is appreciated by the school staff and students. The Elder appreciates the efforts of the school, feels the school is a good place to work, and enjoys spending time there, though did point out that there can be challenges to working with students while concurrently respecting Clan system practices
- The Team heard from staff of the desire from School Council for the Elder position to be increased to full-days and expanded so that the Elder(s) can be in more classrooms to support learning and further connect curriculum to local First Nations culture and language
- Students and staff shared that the breakfast program provides a wide range of cooked and fresh items each morning, and that community members (e.g. RCMP) will come and cook breakfast. Students with whom the team talked appreciate the breakfasts and enjoy them. A number of students also stay at school and enjoy lunch in the lunch room, where positive guidelines for behavior are clearly posted
- The team observed small, but significant, examples of making the school feel more at home and students cared for. For example, couches are available in the office for students who need them, and a large bowl of fruit is placed prominently in the front entrance each morning for students who are hungry
- It was noted that there is a “memory wall” of photos taken over the past years on display in one hallway. The team wondered whether this wall could be added to as a means of continuing this project and reflecting the positive efforts and history of the school

- Related to the above, while there is the historical mural located in the front foyer of the school, and the Native Language room is well-supplied with cultural items and art, the team noted that there had been a reduction of local First Nations artwork, drums, and other cultural reflections on the walls and in display cabinets throughout the school
- Students appreciate culture camps and on-the-land activities, and expressed that they would like to have more experiential and culture-based activities. Related to this, students also expressed excitement about mountain biking and use Montana Mountain as a local resource. The team also heard that Kindergarten students spend a day per week outside as a means of making learning more hands-on, fun, and experiential
- The team heard from staff that there are challenging student behaviours, inappropriate language and swearing, and derogatory and/or racist comments made towards them. In order to promote a climate of clear expectations and supports for appropriate student behavior that does not distract from the learning of others, the school, with the endorsement of School Council, has instituted a Code of Conduct that was developed and co-constructed with the 7/8/9 students
- In order to promote a calm and learning-centered atmosphere, the team heard from staff that having a ‘calming room’ as a place for students who are elevated in their behaviours to find calm, regulate, and re-engage with learning
- In support of the above, staff are engaging in training in PBIS (Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports) as one means of developing a consistent and unified approach to supporting positive student behaviours. The intention is that this framework will be aligned with the values and virtues of CTFN in order to ensure that it is culturally relevant and responsive

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Continue to work as a staff team that is flexible, consistent, and supportive of each other both personally and professionally. Continue to promote the sharing cultural knowledge, language, and understanding amongst the whole staff team
- Continue working as a staff with School Council to ensure that the Code of Conduct continues to be communicated and implemented in a consistent and unified manner by all staff. Ensure that follow-through communication occurs in order to keep relevant participants informed and aware of how issues are addressed and brought to resolution
- Related to the above point, continue to ensure that students are not only advised of inappropriate behaviour and language but also given guidance, instruction, and consistent

positive reinforcement for modelling appropriate language and behaviours to teachers, community, Elders, and each other

- Explore ways in which the Elder in the School program may be staffed more than part-time, and identify ways for Elders to be working and supporting learning in classrooms throughout the day
- Continue to make the school a welcoming place for students and maintain efforts to keep the school an inviting place for parents and families to visit in the mornings, throughout the day, and at important learning events and celebrations
- In order to help support the above, seek ways to make local First Nations culture, artwork, and language more prominent and visible throughout the whole school. In a related manner, with respect to experiential learning, continue to promote outdoor, hands-on, and active learning for all students

School and Community

<p>Characteristics: In continuously improving schools build a shared commitment to success for each learner. The school collaborates with parents, students, school council, First Nations and community to support student learning. Ongoing parent/community involvement is embedded in school culture and the school communicates about progress and challenges in multiple ways.</p>

Observations of the Team:

- School Council members shared with the team their belief that school administration is doing a very good job to keep them informed, included, and empowered in decision-making with regards to school directions and operations. The Council's view is that the school is on an upward trend and could continue to improve with greater parental and community engagement. School Council supports the school as it strives to consistently reinforce appropriate language and behaviour
- In order to support the work identified above, the team heard that a parent/community evening is planned for September to review and discuss the Code of Conduct and expectations for student behavior and language at school
- The team heard that parents at the lower grades appreciate hearing from teachers regarding their children's progress at school. This said, teachers working with older students shared that parents are less willing to discuss student progress and conduct with teachers. As a result, the team learned that parent/teacher/student interviews are not well-attended by parents, and that regular communications with some parents can be difficult or not founded on a team approach that supports learning

- While the review was being conducted, elections for the Carcross/Tagish First Nation were being held. The team felt that this could provide an opportunity for the school and recently-elected school council to meet early in the school year with the new CTFN Executive (once established) to explore ways of working together in the future
- Related to the above point, staff with whom the team met indicated and reinforced multiple times during the review their strong desire to have an Education Support Worker (ESW) located within the school in order to work more closely together in support of student learning and family engagement
- The team observed that the school is open for use by the community: for example, the industrial education shop is open and the school's kiln is used for pottery by community members after the school day is over. This aligns with the school's desire to be a community school that is an open and accessible resource
- A retired Ghùch Tlà Community School teacher helps to provide after-school activities for students. Students appreciate this and enjoy engaging in sports and other activities. The team also heard that many students place very well at inter-school sports events
- School Council expressed concern that culture camps need to be adequately planned for and supported in order to ensure that students are engaged in learning. School Council shared with the team their concern that community resources/members who commit to attend and support the camp may not always follow through on the day of the event

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Early in the new school year, work with Yukon Education senior staff, School Council, and the new CTFN Executive to organize a working meeting where all parties can share educational expectations, identify goals, and contribute to a positive direction for Ghùch Tlà Community School. At such a meeting, a clear commitment to goals with an action plan would be important for achieving and maintaining conditions for learning that are supported by all education partners
- Continue to advocate for the ESW position to be located in the school in order to provide support for students and promote positive relationships and connections with CTFN, parents, and community. Provide an office space within or close to the main administration area for the ESW to be based from
- Related to the above, extend invitations to the ESW to attend staff meetings and take part in school planning sessions in order to promote a closer working relationships

- Seek ways to promote on-going training and opportunities for individual and team/group activities and competitions for students as a means to help students to continually develop their skills and abilities
- Continue to promote positive connections and communications with parents of primary-aged students. Work with School Council to identify ways in which to invite, include and connect all parents to the school in ways that are socially and academically focused (an example shared was the “buddy reading” program previously employed at the school)
- Provide regular updates to CTFN’s Executive regarding the school’s activities, events, initiatives, and directions. Seek time on the new CTFN Executive’s meeting agenda, as appropriate, to foster positive connections with CTFN Government officials
- Seek ways to share the positive works of the school through communication channels that are effective. These could include an update to the school’s website and printed newsletters with pictures celebrating student work and achievements that are posted in prominent community locations (local stores, CTFN government building, etc.)

School Organization

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools organize structures, actions, and interventions to ensure success for each learner. Work in the school is coherent and aligned to focus on improvement. Actions and interventions include effectively differentiating resources, time and professional development to get results. The Department supports the school and makes connections across the Territory to build capacity.

Observations of the Team:

- Small class sizes promote the ability for staff to work individually or in small groups with students who may require specific supports. Students shared with the team that the school is not crowded and this helps them to get support as needed. While this is a strength at Ghùch Tlà Community School, the team wondered how academically stronger students are being challenged and their learning needs supported
- The team observed (and heard from numerous staff members) that the principal is very engaged, organized, and supportive of their work. Collaboration has appeared to increase this school year: The principal is approachable, inclusive in decision-making, and works hard to connect with staff and include school council in the school’s work
- Given the school’s relative proximity to Whitehorse, resources and opportunities for student learning are capitalized upon. Beyond Whitehorse, Ghùch Tlà Community School

students most recently participated in the Junior High REM (Rural Experiential Model) program to build community and access new learning opportunities

- A clear focus is placed on developing a solid academic and social foundation for K-4, K-5, and Primary students, with an emphasis placed on fostering capable readers at this level by experienced teachers who are also trained in Reading Recovery™
- Some staff shared that, while they work to support each other particularly around larger events, greater attention and efforts could be placed on planning and sharing together (teacher-teacher, teacher-EA) around curriculum, long range plans, and daily/weekly lesson planning and resource development
- A part-time Individual Learning Centre (ILC) model has been instituted off-site from the school and operates each afternoon. The team was unsure of the success of this model given it heard that while eight students are enrolled, overall engagement was suggested to be low
- The Industrial Education classroom provides a large, functional workspace for the school. This class has been re-organized since the last review and now appears to be a much tidier operational space
- The team wondered about the location of the 7/8/9 classroom and pondered whether it could be better-located near the gym or the Industrial Education wing to provide better access with minimal disruption to other students. Reorganizing into ‘wings’ or grade clusters could help to minimize disruptions, make for safer and less-frequent student movement in the hallways, and promote better utilization of the school’s resources
- In order to create a sufficient number of students for games and sports activities, the grades 4/5/6 and 7/8/9 classes are combined for PE

Recommendations for moving forward:

- Given the interest in outdoor and experiential activities, consider the development of an outdoor classroom where students, staff, Elders, and community could work and learn together. Consider connecting with other schools that have deployed this approach to learn from their experiences with outdoor classrooms and how they are incorporated into daily teaching
- Continue to work together as a staff with respect to decision-making, communications, collaboration around curriculum and teaching, and problem-solving

- Related to the above point, seek ways to bring more recreational activities into the school for students to engage with and to connect staff with community resources
- With the superintendent and School Council, review the effectiveness of the locally-developed ILC model, and its goals and accomplishments to date, in order to determine if this model is achieving its desired outcomes in its current configuration
- Work with staff to ensure that teachers take the lead on planning for teaching and share their planning and tasks with Educational Assistants on a daily, weekly, and long-range basis
- Give thought to the location of classrooms with consideration given to providing better access to resources with fewer disruptions and better ability to group students if located at either end of the school

School Processes and Progress

Characteristics: Continuously improving schools take responsibility for improving outcomes for students. They use evidence to guide decisions and actions and have processes in place to collectively monitor progress and make adjustments in key areas of their work. They demonstrate improvement over time – for individual students, groups of students, and the school.

Observations of the Team:

- The staff observe student attendance to be consistently good for the majority of students, though did identify that for a small number of students, regular attendance is a challenge
- The team was unsure of the process employed for school-based team (SBT), whether the Pyramid of Intervention is employed as a framework, and how students are referred for presentation and discussion at SBT meetings
- With respect to academic levels and achievement, school administration shared that there has not appeared to have been a strong focus on academics in previous years, and thus some students may be frustrated and not as prepared to move on to high school as they might otherwise be. Older students who spoke with the team shared their perception that students in Whitehorse may be better prepared educationally than they feel they might be

- Space in the school is used to provide for a wide range of student learning needs. For example, there is a quiet room where students can focus and concentrate, a Learning Assistance Room, and space for students to work on applied skills and project-based activities (e.g. bottle rockets)
- With respect to preparation for high school and to support graduation, School Council suggested that a better understanding of the BC Graduation program by students, parents, staff, and Council will be an important strategy to ensuring the highest graduation rates possible
- School Council shared with the team their concerns regarding the social promotion of students. School Council is not in favour of students being promoted to the next grade if they are not academically ready to advance, and feels that parents should have a clear and accurate understanding of their child's current educational progress

Recommendations for moving forward:

- With advice and support from Student Support Services at Yukon Education, ensure that school-based team follows the Pyramid of Intervention approach to identifying and supporting student needs. Ensure that staff are aware of and involved in the development of school-based processes
- Continue to seek ways to make learning engaging, hands-on, experiential, and relevant to older students while ensuring that curricular outcomes are met and academic achievement levels raised. Employ the BC Performance standards to provide a realistic gauge for academic achievement and to identify areas for future academic growth
- Continue to track attendance at all levels and look for ways to maintain and promote positive attendance throughout the school, particularly for student who find consistent attendance a challenge
- Facilitate conversations between Yukon Education and School Council with respect to social promotion in order to ensure that departmental guidelines for current assessment practices and the promotion of students are outlined. This could be done by inviting Yukon Education consultants to attend school council meetings in the 16-17 academic year
- Ensure that staff, students, parents, community, and School Council are informed of the changes to the new BC High School Graduation program as they becomes available. Beginning in grade 7, start informing students and their families of the path to graduation in order that all are knowledgeable regarding what is required to graduate with a BC

Dogwood Diploma. Visuals of the new BC High School Graduation program could be clearly displayed and shared to help promote broader understanding

In conclusion

The team enjoyed its visit to Ghùch Tlà Community School. The building is a positive resource for the school, the staff care about their students and wish the best for their growth and development, though concerns with respect to language and behaviour were raised. Students with whom the team met were thoughtful, helpful, and engaged learners who enjoy much of what the school has to offer.

The team understands that 2015-16 has been transitional in nature, given the arrival of a new principal and some staff changes during this year. This has required the staff to work together to implement new processes and develop shared expectations at the school.

A dominant theme emerging during the review was the desire for greater support for the school and staff in its work to provide the best learning environment and opportunities possible for all students. To move forward, the Review Team feels that a renewed commitment to greater teamwork amongst all partners and a reconciliation to work together in the interests of the vast potential and positive futures of Ghùch Tlà Community School students will be foundational for personal and academic growth to flourish.

Practices to share:

- The development of a school-wide Code of Conduct with support and endorsement from School Council
- An open, community-school approach that welcomes community members to use school facilities
- The daily presence of an Elder in the school to work with students and support learning
- The use of local outdoor natural resources to provide experiential activities for students

Considerations for Yukon Education

- Lead the organization of a meeting with School Council, CTFN Executive, senior Yukon Education officials, and consultants to discuss ways in which Ghùch Tlà Community School can be supported by all partners
- Consider the deployment of a full-time social-emotional counsellor to support students at Ghùch Tlà Community School
- Consider the development of an education agreement between Yukon Education and CTFN with the involvement and inputs of Ghùch Tlà Community School and School Council as a means to identify areas of shared interest
- Seek ways to support the expansion of the Elder in the School program to a full-time position
- Consider supporting the school to examine the potential of re-organizing classrooms and developing and equipping further the ‘calming room’ with appropriate furniture/materials/work stations