



Framework for Enhancing Student Learning
School Plan

Bench Elementary School
2020-2021





Our Story

What are the unique, positive characteristics of our school?

Bench Elementary is situated in rural Cowichan Bay on the traditional territory of the Quw'utsun People. The school property is rich in green space, which learners love to explore, and it is bordered by farms. Our school is a hop, skip, and a jump away from the Cowichan Bay Nature Estuary Centre, Cherry Point Beach, Cobble Hill Mountain, and one of Quw'utsun Tribes' traditional winter villages, Tl'ulpalus. Being close to the natural world is helping our school community better understand the First Peoples Principle of Learning that "Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)."

What are the important demographics of our school and community?

Bench Elementary is a Kindergarten to Grade 7 school with an enrollment of approximately 350 in-person learners and 30 remote learners for the 2020-2021 school year. Approximately 8% of Bench learners are of Indigenous descent. Bench Elementary School was founded in 1872. It is a school with "generational memories" and much-loved traditions such as fun fair, the Christmas Emporium and the Halloween Parade! Bench is family-oriented with a driven and networked Parent Advisory Group. Due to the Pandemic, our entire community missed not having family in our school as much this year. Bench is a school with a shifting demographic. The staff has noticed a growing diversity among the learners and families for whom our school serves.

What do we celebrate?

Our learners are compassionate, creative and curious individuals who love to design, explore, move, and shake up the world through student-directed change initiatives! We make space for their voices and we celebrate their contributions. We are mindful to use a strength-based lens and celebrate the gifts of each of our learners. We celebrate where our learners are at and build on their successes. We celebrate the growing diversity among the learners and families as it enriches our entire school community. We strive to be inclusive and we pride ourselves on having a strong sense of community. In normal years, this has been developed through 'Buddies', collaborative group work across classes, clubs (chess, choir, knitting, robotics, Mine Craft Education, intermural sports, coding etc.), events, athletics, Long Recess Ambassadors, and the Leadership group. We look forward to deepening our understanding of place, community, family, and land to nurture a sense of pride and belonging for each Bench learner.

Our Learners

What are the strengths and stretches we see in our Learners?

- Strengths – Creative, curious, innovative, social, hands-on, and are overall proficient readers and oral communicators.
- Stretches – Social emotional, Mental Health, numeracy (problem-solving), and communicating through writing.

What evidence do we have of these strengths and stretches?

- Strengths –
 - *Creative, curious, innovative, social, and hands-on*: Evidence includes participation and performance in ADST learning opportunities at both district and school-based events. We have focused on coding, designing, prototyping, robotics and 3D printing for the past five years. We have a growing number of teachers embracing Challenge-Based Learning and the teacher-librarian has taken the lead on ensuring all learners are technologically literate and can use technology to develop their creative thinking competence.
 - *Overall proficient readers and oral communicators*: Evidence includes Early Success and DART data as well as data reported through the Jan/June learning summaries. The # of learners identified by teachers via SBT as emerging/developing readers in need of personal learning plans and additional support for reading makes up less than 10%. The EDI data for the two areas our learners reside, South Cowichan and Cowichan Bay-Glenora, shows that between 7% and 16% of children are vulnerable in the two academic domains - language & cognitive development and communication & general knowledge.

- Stretches –
 - *Social emotional & Mental Health*: Evidence includes the growing number of students referred to SBT and to the school counsellor for worrisome behaviour, anxiety and low social emotional competence. The increase in the number of calls from parents reporting worrisome behaviour about other students during unstructured time was notable. The number of students in need of an alternate place (not the classroom) to regulate increased this year. The number of students the SBT and the school counsellor designated and referred to Child and Youth Mental Health and Cowichan Valley Youth Services also increased. The EDI data for the two areas our learners reside, South Cowichan and Cowichan Bay-Glenora, shows that between 14% and 24% of children are vulnerable in the two SEL domains – emotional maturity and social competence.
 - *Learning*:
 - *Numeracy (problem-solving)*: For the past two years, we have had a high participation in the Foundation Skills Assessment. Over these two years, the data shows that problem-solving requiring learners to apply skills and to think mathematically is a stretch.
 - *Communicating through writing*: For the past two years, we have had a high participation in the Foundation Skills Assessment. Over these two years, the data shows that writing, especially in grade 7, is an area requiring student growth. Teachers have also identified writing as an area in need of growth through their classroom assessments and the DWW. It is a trend that teachers are aware of and have begun to address through exemplars and explicit teaching.
 - *Indigenous Ways of Knowing*: Although our school population is growing in diversity, our understanding of Indigenous language, history and culture is at a developing level. Staff has expressed a desire to build our capacity and confidence in this area.

Our Goals

Based on the needs in our school and the Strategic plan, what priorities will we focus on to enhance success for our learners?

1. *Culture of Care*: Continue to focus on supporting the mental wellness and social emotional well-being of our learners.
2. *Learning*:
 - a. Continue to develop our learners' written communication skills and develop strategies to become effective and intentional communicators for diverse audiences, and for a variety of purposes.
 - b. Continue to design numeracy learning experiences that allow learners to develop their problem-solving skills and their foundational numeracy skills in connection to real-world experiences.
3. *Indigenous Ways of Knowing*: Deepen our school community's understanding of place-based historical knowledge, language and culture.

What actions/strategies will we take/use to support our goals?

1. *Culture of Care*: We will continue to learn more about SEL/Trauma-informed resources, strategies and tools. We will continue to use Zones of Regulation, EASE, and "Reclaiming our students" to grow learners' mental health and emotional literacy by teaching them about their emotions through images and vocabulary, differentiating between small and large problems, and ways to problem-solve difficult social situations. We will utilize two assessment tools that Richard Matthews shared with us. One was an environmental assessment to complete with all classes in order to determine 'hot/cool' zones in and around the school from the students' perspective. The other is a survey to get a better sense of students' perception of safety at school. These tools will provide us with more data to inform a plan moving forward.
2. *Learning*:
 - a. Written communication skills and strategies – For two years, a small group of teachers has been using the SD 71 Writing Continuums and exemplars to explicitly teach writing skills. We will continue this work and aim to grow the use of the writing continuums across the school.
 - b. Numeracy – This is a new area we will dive into with guidance from a lead teacher. We have been moving away from using Jump Math. Work needs to be done to determine how to support learners in applying foundational skills to solve math problems. We also need an assessment tool to monitor progress. How do we teach learners to approach a problem? How do we develop mathematical comprehension? How do we design learning with the mathematical curricular competencies in mind, K through 7?
3. *Indigenous Ways of Knowing*:
 - Our teacher-librarian has been building our bank of Indigenous focused resources.
 - We need to purchase texts that reflect diversity and Indigenous Worldview for our classrooms such as Leveled readers and classroom libraries.
 - NOII Case Study – Next year will be year 2. The focus is on transition and engagement of our Indigenous learners.
 - Continue to learn more about the cultural and historical significance of the land on which we learn.
 - Practice land acknowledgments.
 - Continue to learn about what "Time Immemorial of the Quw'utsun people" means through Ye'yumnuts.

What evidence of learning will we collect to check the progress of our goals? Please include both map (school level) and street level (student voice) data.

Map Level –

- Continue to use Student learning survey, FSA, DART, ESS, DWW, and EDI.
- We would welcome an opportunity to participate in the MDI.
- Find and implement a tool to assess, and progress monitor in numeracy.

Street Level –

- Student surveys
- Student interviews
- Make space for learner, family and staff stories. Share these stories and amplify those that support our goals.
- Systematize the “Power of 3” to ensure our vulnerable learners have a support structure at school that extends to their families to improve their learning. The student learning survey data showed that we are great at making students feel belonging and listening to them, but this year’s data did not include the voices of our vulnerable learners.

Our story is beyond . . .

Please share a story (individual or group) that tells a narrative about your school?

Over the past three years, in response to our professional learning and growth in understanding related to reconciliation and equity, we have advocated successfully for the transportation needs of our on-reserve Indigenous learners. Three years ago, the story was that our on-reserve Indigenous learners did not attend school regularly. By reaching out to families and asking them about any barriers/challenges they may be experiencing, the families identified transportation. In each case, in order to catch the school bus, the children were expected to walk a route to the bus stop that was unsafe. The families did not have an alternate way of getting their children to school and relied solely on the school bus. The families said they were conflicted because they wanted their children to attend school but saw the walk to reach the bus stop as unsafe. Therefore, their children simply did not attend school. In one instance, in order to ride the bus, the children needed to cross a busy 4-lane highway that had neither an accessible crosswalk nor adequate street lights. In another instance, the children had to walk at least 1 km on a busy road with commercial traffic and this walk had neither a walking shoulder nor adequate lighting. By working with transportation, this year these children had a safe door-to-door service and their attendance, sense of belonging and connectedness to school increased. This story shows how we are applying our growing understanding of how an effective learning environment pays attention to the whole learner. We are learning that “the holistic nature of life and education are central and critical to the discussion of Indigenous views of education because they underpin Indigenous learning of human development and learning. “There is not a natural separation between the concept of education and the rest of the person’s experience (Jo Chrona).”