

HIGHLAND SECONDARY SCHOOL

GROWTH PLAN 2026–2027

Decolonizing, Indigenizing Commitment

Highland Secondary's School Growth Plan reflects an ongoing commitment to reconciliation and aligns with the K'ómoks First Nation Local Education Agreement (LEA), the Indigenous Education Enhancement Agreement, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. This commitment is grounded in relationships, cultural respect, and a shared responsibility to support the success, identity, and well-being of Indigenous learners.

The LEA emphasizes collaboration, culturally relevant programming, local Indigenous knowledge, and safe, inclusive learning environments. At Highland, this work is embedded in both everyday practice and longer-term school initiatives. Territorial acknowledgements are incorporated into assemblies, announcements, and school events, reinforcing our relationship to place and community.



Over the past few years, Highland has intentionally worked to increase the visibility and presence of Indigenous culture throughout the school. One example is the development of a new school logo designed by local Indigenous artist and Highland graduate, Karver Everson. Reflecting Highland's Kwakwaka name, *I'katsi* ("place up high"), the logo has become an important symbol of the school's ongoing learning journey and commitment to reconciliation. More importantly, it has created opportunities for students and staff to engage in conversations about identity, place, culture, and community.

One of the most significant initiatives has been the creation of a dedicated Gathering Space. Over the past two years, an underutilized sewing room has been transformed into a welcoming and culturally responsive environment for Indigenous students, families, Elders, Indigenous Support Workers, and community members. The space includes Indigenous artwork, a kitchen, flexible seating, a circle-based workspace, a cedar backdrop, and views of the surrounding forest. Its dedicated entrance has increased accessibility and comfort for families and community visitors. The impact of this space extends beyond its physical design; it has strengthened relationships, increased family engagement, and provided students with a place where they feel connected, supported, and valued.



Connections to land and place continue to be strengthened through initiatives such as the school garden, which incorporates Indigenous plants, and an orienteering course that includes local teachings and ecological knowledge. Staff continue to deepen relationships with K'ómoks First Nation through Indigenous Success Team meetings, collaboration with Indigenous Education staff, and engagement with Elders, artists, and knowledge keepers.

Wholistic Learning and the Circle of Courage



Beginning in 2021, Highland began to use the Circle of Courage as a school-wide framework for understanding student development and supporting core competency growth.

Belonging is fostered through relationship-based practices, culturally responsive learning, inclusive classroom environments, and spaces such as the Gathering Space.

Mastery is supported through meaningful learning experiences, competency-based assessment practices, and opportunities for students to demonstrate growth over time.

Independence is developed by providing students with voice, choice, ownership of learning, and opportunities to set goals and monitor progress.

Generosity is encouraged through collaboration, leadership, mentorship, community engagement, and opportunities to contribute to the collective well-being of the school.

Together, these principles support a wholistic approach to learning that addresses academic, social, emotional, and cultural development while supporting BC's Core Competencies.

Context and Portrait of the School

Highland Secondary is situated on the unceded traditional territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, including the Pentlach, E'iksan, Sahtloot, and Sasitla peoples. We are grateful for the privilege of learning and working on this land and for the opportunity to support the students and families in our community.

Highland currently serves approximately 742 students in Grades 8–12, including approximately 110 students who identify as Indigenous. The school also serves a diverse population that includes international students, students with diverse learning needs, students from military families connected to CFB Comox, and students from three feeder elementary schools.

Highland offers a comprehensive secondary program including a wide range of academic and elective courses, ENTER2, Makerspace, and an International Student Program. Students are supported through learning support services, counselling, youth and family support, Indigenous education services, and a variety of inclusive programming opportunities.

At its heart, Highland is a school grounded in relationships. Our motto, "Highland Has Heart," reflects our commitment to creating an environment where students feel connected, supported, and valued.

Reflection on Previous Year's Learning

Over the past year, staff engaged in collaborative inquiry centered on student engagement. Through staff discussion, classroom observations, student feedback, and anecdotal evidence, teachers consistently identified engagement as one of the most significant factors influencing student success.

As a result, Highland's focus for 2025–2026 was student engagement through student-centered assessment. Staff explored approaches such as co-created criteria, student goal setting, self-assessment, descriptive feedback, and opportunities for revision. This work increased our understanding of how assessment practices influence motivation, engagement, and ownership of learning.

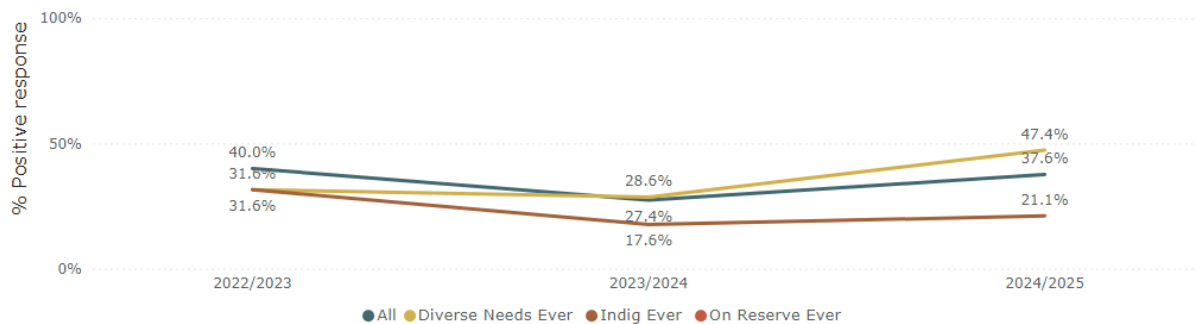
While this work led to positive shifts, it also revealed an important insight: engagement is deeply connected to students' sense of belonging, identity, purpose, and agency. As a staff, we recognized that strengthening engagement requires us to intentionally develop students' core competencies in ways that are meaningful, culturally responsive, and connected to student experience.

A staff survey conducted during this process identified student engagement, belonging, Indigenous learning, assessment practices, and competency development as areas where staff believed focused effort would have the greatest impact on student learning.

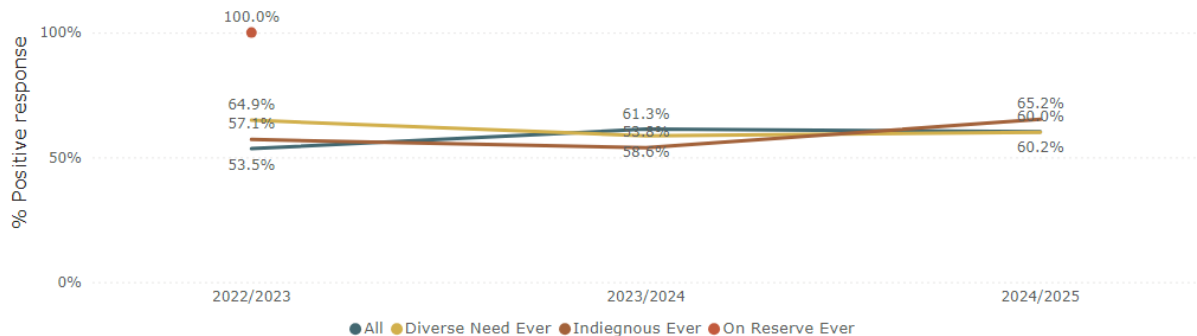
Our Learners: What the Evidence Tells Us

Indigenous Learning

Highland Secondary, Grade 10 - At school, are you being taught about local First Nations?



District, Grade 12 - At school, are you being taught about Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit, Metis) in C...



Student Learning Survey results suggest positive movement in students' experiences with Indigenous learning; however, results remain inconsistent across grade levels and student groups. Compared to district trends, Highland demonstrates greater variability, particularly in Grade 10 responses.

Students are generally reporting greater exposure to Indigenous content than to local First Nations knowledge, suggesting that place-based learning is not yet consistently embedded across classrooms. This indicates a need to strengthen school-wide coherence and ensure that all students have meaningful opportunities to engage with local Indigenous perspectives.

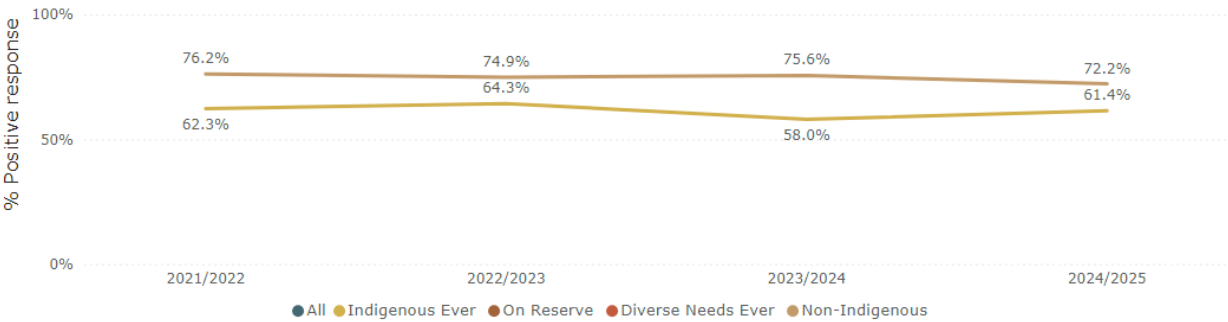
At the same time, several recent initiatives demonstrate encouraging progress. The Gathering Space, Indigenous artwork, land-based learning opportunities, and development of the new school logo,

and the creation of a welcome wall, have increased the visibility of Indigenous perspectives and strengthened relationships within the school community. Ongoing collaboration with Indigenous Support Workers, K'ómoks First Nation, and Indigenous Education staff provides a strong foundation for continued growth.

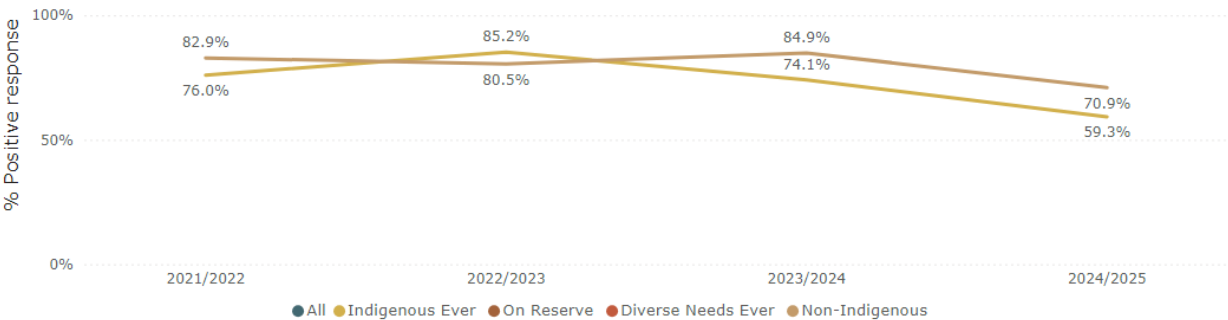
Literacy

Literacy data suggests that many students successfully develop reading and writing skills during their secondary years, with stronger and more consistent outcomes evident by Grade 12. However, Grade 10 results show greater variability, suggesting that some students require additional support earlier in their secondary experience.

District Grade 10 Literacy



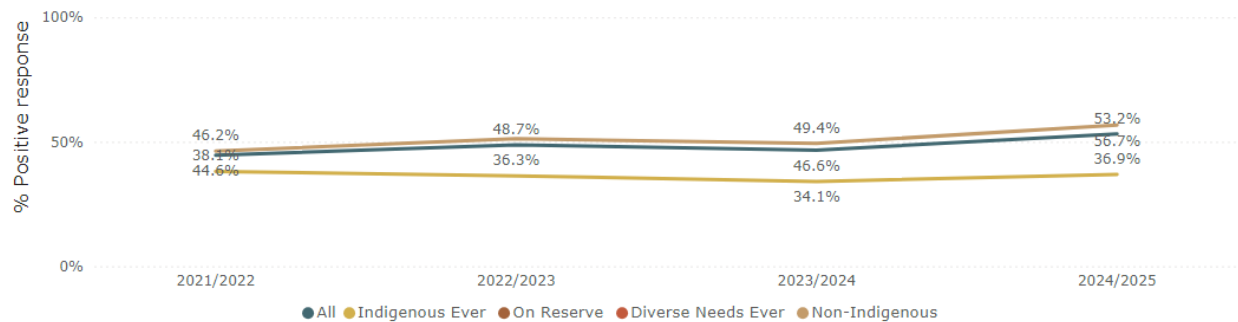
Highland Secondary Grade 10 Literacy



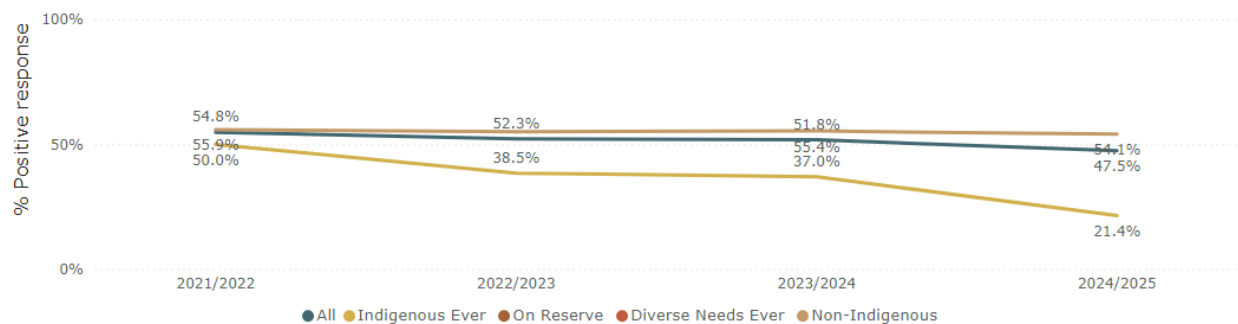
This year, Grade 8 English teachers collaborated to pilot common school wide literacy assessments designed to provide meaningful information about students' strengths and needs. While some tools effectively measured reading fluency and comprehension, staff identified a need for a more competency-based approach that better reflects how students read, think, communicate, and make meaning. This work will continue next year.

Numeracy

District Grade 10 Numeracy



Highland Secondary Grade 10 Numeracy



Grade 10 Numeracy Assessment results indicate that many students meet expectations; however, the school has limited information about students' numeracy development prior to Grade 10.

The development of a Grade 8 school wide numeracy assessment will allow us to identify student strengths and areas for growth earlier in their secondary experience. Earlier information will help teachers plan targeted interventions and provide supports before students experience significant challenges or disengagement in mathematics.

Examples of support may include:

- Small-group numeracy instruction based on identified learning needs
- Targeted support blocks and intervention opportunities
- Explicit teaching of problem-solving strategies and mathematical reasoning

- Opportunities for students to explain and communicate their mathematical thinking
- Increased use of formative assessment and descriptive feedback
- Cross-curricular numeracy connections that help students see relevance in real-world contexts

A focus on confidence, engagement, and mindset will include:

- Creating classroom environments where mistakes are viewed as an important part of learning
- Providing multiple entry points into problem-solving tasks so all learners can experience success
- Offering opportunities for collaboration and peer-to-peer learning
- Highlighting multiple solution pathways rather than a single "correct" way to solve a problem
- Building student reflection practices so learners can identify their strengths and next steps
- Designing learning experiences that connect mathematics to authentic, real-world situations

Through the lens of the Circle of Courage, this work supports:

- **Belonging** by creating safe learning environments where students feel comfortable taking risks
- **Mastery** through opportunities to build competence and confidence over time
- **Independence** by encouraging students to explain their thinking and develop ownership of learning
- **Generosity** through collaborative problem-solving and helping others learn

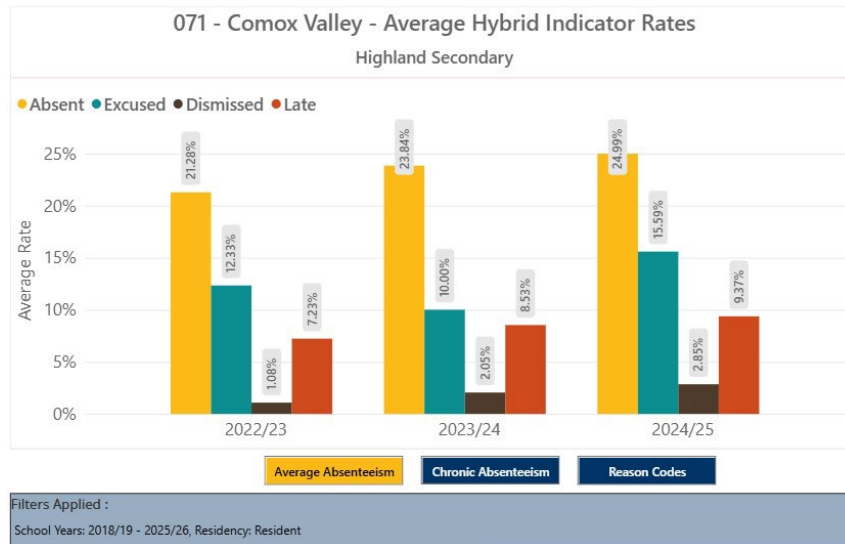
Recognizing this gap, Highland plans to develop a Grade 8 numeracy assessment designed to provide earlier insight into students' strengths and learning needs. This work will support more responsive instruction and help build student confidence, engagement, and mathematical identity

Staff Engagement:

In another staff survey conducted this June 2026 identified Personal Awareness and Responsibility and Personal Cultural identity focuses for next school year. Several staff also emphasized the need to focus on Critical and Reflective thinking which the circle of courage can also enhance and support. Throughout the school year staff continue to express concerns about student attendance and the challenges this has impacting the learning and student success.

Attendance and Engagement

All Resident Students

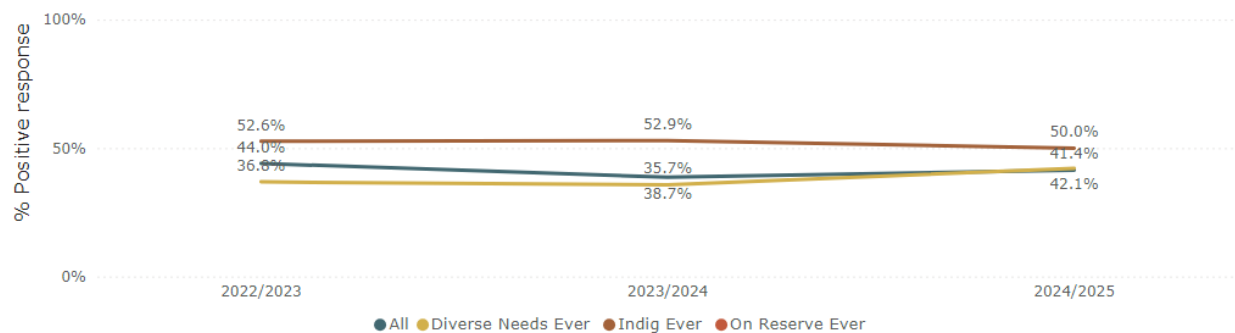


Attendance data over the past three years shows trends similar to those experienced throughout the district. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, overall absences have increased, with the most significant growth occurring in excused absences.

While students continue to demonstrate connection to school, attendance patterns suggest that many are attending less consistently. Through the lens of the Circle of Courage, attendance can be viewed as a reflection of belonging, engagement, success, and connection rather than simply compliance. This reinforces the importance of creating learning experiences that are relevant, meaningful, and relationship centered as well as our continued commitment to improving student engagement through our work.

CORE COMPETENCIES EVIDENCE:

Highland Secondary, Grade 10 - At school, are you learning to be a critical thinker?



Critical Thinking and Core Competency Development

Student Learning Survey data related to critical thinking suggests that many students are developing skills related to analyzing ideas, solving problems, making connections, and considering different perspectives.

Following a decline in positive responses during 2023/24, student perceptions improved in 2024/25, suggesting that recent efforts to increase student engagement and student-centred learning may be having a positive impact. Despite this improvement, fewer than half of students report that they are consistently learning to be critical thinkers, indicating an opportunity to strengthen intentional development of this competency across all classrooms.

The data also reveals promising trends for some student groups. Students with diverse learning needs report increasing opportunities to develop critical thinking, while Indigenous students consistently report more positive experiences than the overall student population. These results suggest that strong practices exist within the school and provide opportunities to identify and expand effective approaches.

What We Have Learned

As a staff, we have learned that critical thinking does not develop automatically. Students are more likely to engage in deeper thinking when learning is relevant, connected to their lives, and provides opportunities for inquiry, problem solving, discussion, and reflection.

Our recent work with student-centred assessment has reinforced the importance of giving students opportunities to:

- explain their thinking
- ask questions
- consider multiple perspectives
- receive feedback and revise their work
- connect learning to real-world situations

Moving Forward

As Highland shifts its focus toward Personal and Social Competency, with Thinking and Communication embedded throughout, we will continue to create learning experiences that intentionally develop critical thinking across subject areas.

Examples of this work include:

- inquiry-based learning projects
- Humanities Expo projects with authentic audiences
- place-based and Indigenous learning experiences
- collaborative problem-solving tasks
- student self-reflection and goal setting
- opportunities for students to explain, defend, and revise their thinking

This work aligns closely with the Circle of Courage. Critical thinking supports **Mastery** as students build competence and confidence, while opportunities for student voice and inquiry strengthen **Independence** and ownership of learning

Student Voice

Student voice has emerged as an important strength at Highland. During the past two years, students worked alongside administration to create a formal Student Government structure designed by and run by students. Students have organized elections, facilitated surveys and town halls, and advocated for school improvements.

One example involved a student-led letter to the School Board regarding school facilities. The initiative resulted in a formal response from district leadership and demonstrated the impact of authentic student leadership.

These experiences provide meaningful opportunities for students to develop communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and leadership skills while strengthening their sense of agency and belonging.

Student Government has grown significantly, increasing student voice and leadership. Students have meaningfully engaged in school decisions and advocacy.

Equity and Inclusive Education

In recent years, Highland has made a commitment to supporting students with diverse learning needs within their neighbourhood school whenever possible. Rather than relying exclusively on programs located elsewhere, staff have developed increasingly individualized approaches that allow more students to remain connected to their school community.

Examples include individualized schedules, social connection opportunities, tea trolley programs, peer support initiatives, and integration into courses aligned with student interests and strengths. This ongoing work reflects Highland's commitment to inclusion, personalization, and belonging.

Overall, Highland demonstrates strong inclusive practices and growing student opportunities for engagement, leadership, and connection. However, the evidence also suggests variability in student experience, particularly in Indigenous learning, engagement, attendance, and competency development. Moving forward, our focus will be on creating greater consistency so that all students experience meaningful learning, belonging, and opportunities to thrive. As well a focus in the classroom on UDL strategies and practices.

Core Competency Focus Area

Focus: Personal & Social (with Thinking and Communication embedded)

Highland will focus on strengthening **belonging, engagement, and connection to learning**, recognizing that core competencies develop best through meaningful, relevant experiences.

supported through:

- Indigenous learning
- belonging
- engagement
- student voice
- attendance
- personalized learning
- Circle of Courage

Why Personal & Social Competency?

- Over the past year, staff have engaged in inquiry related to student engagement and student-centred assessment. Through this work, a common theme emerged: students are more successful when they experience a sense of belonging, see themselves reflected in their learning, understand the purpose of what they are learning, and have opportunities to contribute meaningfully to their school community.
- Student Learning Survey data, attendance data, Indigenous learning data, and student voice all point to the importance of strengthening students' sense of connection and agency. These indicators align closely with the Personal and Social Competency and the Circle of Courage framework.
- While thinking and communication remain important areas of growth, staff believe that strengthening belonging, identity, engagement, self-awareness, and social responsibility will provide the foundation from which the other competencies can flourish.

Student Outcomes:

Students will increasingly:

- identify strengths and areas for growth in their reflections on their learning
- set goals and reflect on progress
- communicate their ideas confidently
- collaborate effectively with others and be able to give examples of..
- connect learning to identity, culture, place, and community
- demonstrate resilience when faced with challenge
- contribute positively to their classroom and school community
- describe how their learning connects to future goals

Examples

Examples may include:

- student-led conferences
 - self-assessment and reflection
 - Humanities Expo presentations
 - collaborative inquiry projects
 - participation in Student Government
 - place-based and Indigenous learning projects
 - community service initiatives
 - outdoor learning experiences
-

What This Will Look Like for Staff

Staff will:

- intentionally teach and assess core competencies
- create opportunities for voice and choice
- embed Indigenous perspectives and local knowledge
- use student-centred assessment practices
- create inclusive classrooms where students feel safe taking risks
- design learning experiences that require collaboration and critical thinking

Examples

Examples may include:

- co-created criteria
- descriptive feedback
- student goal-setting
- competency self-reflections
- cross-curricular projects
- project-based learning
- land-based learning experiences
- use of local Indigenous stories and perspectives

Design Principles

- Wholistic learning (Circle of Courage)
- Culturally responsive / place-based
- Personalization
- Relational practice
- Student voice and agency

Implementation & Capacity

Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Development

Teachers will continue developing Grade 8 literacy and numeracy assessments designed to provide earlier information about learner strengths and needs. These assessments will focus on curricular competencies and support responsive instruction and intervention.

Humanities Expo

English and Social Studies teachers will collaborate to design a cross-curricular Humanities Expo that provides opportunities for inquiry, communication, collaboration, and authentic audiences. We are looking to incorporate other authentic audience events such as a Mastery Night

Outdoor Learning

Math and Science teachers will continue developing outdoor learning experiences designed to improve engagement while supporting place-based and experiential learning.

Indigenous Learning Partnerships

Teachers will continue building relationships with Indigenous Education staff, Elders, artists, and knowledge keepers to strengthen local Indigenous learning opportunities and increase confidence in implementation.

Student-Centred Assessment

To strengthen students' ownership of learning teachers will continue exploring engaging practices such as

- co-created criteria
- descriptive feedback
- self-assessment
- portfolios
- goal setting
- opportunities for revision

Collaboration will include:

- Department teams
- Cross-curricular planning
- Indigenous Success Team
- Release time for co-design and reflection

Resources priorities:

- Collaboration time
- Indigenous partnerships
- Engaging, inclusive learning experiences

Monitoring & Reflecting

Monitoring will occur:

- Quarterly (leadership + staff)
- Ongoing in team collaboration
- Monthly Staff meeting learning connections and sharing
- Year end May staff sharing celebration of School Growth Projects

Evidence includes:

- Student Learning Survey
- Attendance data
- Student voice
- Classroom evidence
- Staff reflection

If progress stalls:

- Adjust instructional strategies
- Increase professional learning
- Strengthen support for priority learners

Community Communication

Our focus is on helping students feel more **connected, confident, and engaged**.

We will:

- Share updates through newsletters, PAC, and website
- Monitor engagement, attendance, and student voice
- Work with families to support attendance and learning

Families can support by:

- Encouraging attendance
- Talking about learning
- Staying connected to the school
- Attending Mastery events
- Answering surveys and attending parent events