

*Independent Review Findings
for Xpey'; the Only Indigenous
Focus School in the Vancouver
School District*

*Empowered and Engaged Students, 100%
Committed Staff, Manageable Challenges*



Acknowledgements

Much gratitude and first acknowledgements must go to the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples, who are the unceded territorial hosts to the Xpey' Indigenous Focus School, families & learning places.

Next, many thanks go to the Vancouver Board of Education for supporting this review, and especially Associate Superintendent Jody Langlois and Indigenous Education Vice Principal Chas Desjarlais who initiated the review, supported Indigenous ways of doing things, and provided guidance and encouragement.

Finally, this review wouldn't have taken place without the many hours of discussions and assistance offered by the Xpey' Principal, Rose MacKenzie, administrative assistant Elizabeth Cho, PAC leads Keri Guelke and Elder Lix Lopez, the parents, family members, community members, and students; the teachers, support workers, resource workers, the Indigenous education worker, counselor, cook and past staff. Thank you also to the anonymous survey participants, and to Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald and Dr. Don Fiddler, who shared their perspectives on the beginnings, goals and developments of the Indigenous Focus School.

I pray, with the Creator's help, that this review will have a good influence upon the delivery of Indigenous focused education, for the benefit of all students and staff, and towards more equitable outcomes for Indigenous students in the Vancouver School District.

Layout: Sharon Shirt, Sierra Ventures, Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Alberta
Front cover art: Wade Stamp, Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Alberta
Review Photographs: Dawn Marsden, Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Ontario

Researched, written and submitted to the Vancouver School Board by Dr. Dawn Marsden of Good Relations Research & Consulting.

March 2019.

Table of Contents

XPEY' REVIEW CONTEXT		5
XPEY' REVIEW PARTICIPANTS		9
XPEY' REVIEW FINDINGS: STRENGTHS		13
XPEY' REVIEW FINDINGS: CHALLENGES		17
XPEY' REVIEW CONCLUSIONS		29
XPEY' REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS		32
REFERENCES		34
APPENDICES		37

Appendix 1: Study Procedures	37
Appendix 2: Discussion Topic List	40
Appendix 3: Online Survey	41
Appendix 4: Word Frequency Table	45
Appendix 5: Seismic Upgrade List	48
Appendix 6: Water Report	49

XPEY' REVIEW

CONTEXT



Xpey' Review Context

The following section is a narrative summary of multiple participant perspectives about the context of the Xpey' Indigenous Focus School, as shared with the reviewer. Review participants included Elders, staff parents, children and related professionals. Inaccuracies reflect both the gaps and the diversity of the information shared over three months, and may indicate areas for clarification.

In January of 2011, the Vancouver Board of Education (VSB) invited Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald to lead a community consultation around the creation of a mini-school with an Aboriginal lens. A lot of excitement was generated and hopes for an Aboriginal school with both academic and cultural excellence was high. The report laid out goals, qualifications, concerns, and concluded that the time was right for a K-12 Aboriginal Focus School for students across the district. A comprehensive report detailing community recommendations was submitted to the VSB. Figure 1 and Table 1 show recommendations for a wholistic learning framework, and school goals (Archibald et al, 2011).

In the spring of 2011, the VSB approved the development of the school, and in October, formed a Steering Committee under the leadership of Dr. Dan Guinan, to choose a location, recruit staff and students. MacDonald Elementary was chosen because of it's high Indigenous population, central location and space to expand. An Aboriginal

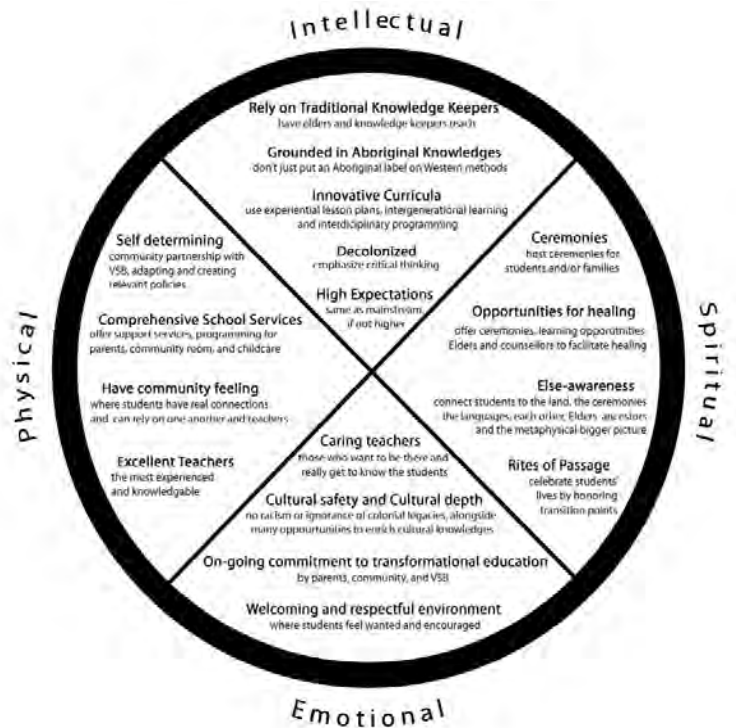


Figure 1: Aboriginal Wholistic Learning Framework for the Indigenous Focus School (Archibald, Raynor & Big Head, 2011).

Table 1. [Xpey'] School Goals (Archibald et al, 2011)

A.	Strive for excellence in which students are confident, respectful, critical thinkers and engaged learners
B.	Focus on quality education through Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, culture, and values
C.	Maintain high expectations for student learning and success
D.	Value cultural diversity
E.	Develop a welcoming, culturally safe, and inclusive school environment
F.	Engage parents and community groups in school planning and decision-making.



Caucus was formed under Dr. Debra Martel and the Aboriginal Education department, to provide input and advice on implementing the vision. In February of 2012, the VSB announced their intent to open an Aboriginal Focus School for September of 2012, beginning with Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms. The phase-in process was rationalized as a way to create an Aboriginal focus, while protecting teacher's union rights, and enabling gradual adjustments without extra funding or a new building.

Between April and June 2012, a Human Rights exemption was obtained regarding Aboriginal staffing; Sir William MacDonald Elementary (henceforth the School) was announced as the selected location for the Aboriginal Focus School, and a forum was held for parent input, but was disrupted by parents who did not want the School to become Aboriginal focused. Later, several Indigenous teachers and an Indigenous Principal were hired for the school, and Dr. Don Fiddler was hired as the new lead for the Aboriginal Education department. No additional planning, training or resources were provided for the transition or conversion of the School from a mainstream school into an Aboriginal focused Program of Choice.

The logical assumption by many was that the Indigenous Focus School would be under the direction of the Indigenous Education department, which is the only VSB department charged with raising awareness, providing Indigenous learning opportunities, supporting Indigenous students, promoting the integration of Indigenous knowledge into classroom curricula. However, a decision was made to govern the school as Program of Choice rather than situate or fund it under the Indigenous Education department. Review participants speculated that this governance decision was made to ensure staff union rights were respected.

The result, some stated, was that the Aboriginal Education department could not fully lead the Aboriginal Focus School, only provide advice and advocate for Indigenous initiatives, as it does for all VSB schools. Staff reported that the onus was on Indigenous staff at Xpey' to develop Indigenous approaches and curriculum, in addition to their regular school tasks. The Aboriginal Education department provided some books with Aboriginal content, some visits by the resident VSB Elder, and some advice to staff during the transition. It was also able to provided a full-time Aboriginal

Education Worker instead of requiring Xpey' to share one, like other schools, and secured a \$15,000 grant for purchase of Aboriginal art for the School; Dr. Fiddler personally paid for the School interior to be painted.

From 2013 to present, the School added one classroom per year with an Aboriginal focus and hired Indigenous teachers, resource and support workers as the positions became available. Year by year, staff reported adding Indigenous curriculum, approaches, resources and supplies to the school, primarily through use of personal funds. A small, shared grant of \$500/year was applied for every year. Additional resources were obtained through teacher and Principal efforts to secure donations and grants for things like old computers and field trips. Some agencies lent personnel, and some university students volunteered to do their practicum at the School, or volunteered to help with program development and services.

In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Call to Action (2015) was released, and informed the development of a new VSB Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement (June 2016 to June 2021) that replace the 2009 to 2014 agreement. After much lobbying by the School PAC, staff and trustees, three motions were passed in 2015:

1. That the VSB declare a moratorium on any closure discussion regarding Macdonald School until at least 2020.
2. That the Board request the Minister of Education's immediate approval of funding to seismically upgrade Macdonald School
3. That the Board initiate a consultation process regarding consideration of re-naming Macdonald School.



The closure discussion refers to recommendations made by the Special Advisor (Ernst & Young, 2015):

- 6.14 to assess the potential proceeds from retired or re-purposed capital assets
- 6.15 to consider long-term enrolment expectations
- 6.17 to assess the education impacts and benefits as part of any capacity rationalization, school consolidation or school closure business case
- 6.18 to move towards a 95% capacity utilization (21 in Kindergarten, 23 in Grades 1 to 3, 29 in Grades 4 to 7), and
- 6.20 to close schools identified in the Preliminary List.

According to review participants, the School is on valuable real estate, is old, needs repair and upgrading, has a low enrollment rate, and has a persistent stigma and negative press around a rough past, high numbers of students with special needs and incomplete establishment of an Indigenous focus. These factors have added insecurities to the transition process and development of the Indigenous Focus School: staff and family members have expressed ongoing anxiety with threats of school closure every year, due to low early-registration rates.

In 2017, the name of the school was changed, after much consultation and some ceremony, from Sir William Macdonald Elementary School, to Xpey' Indigenous Focus School, though it's still known by some as MacDonald Elementary. This year (2018-2019) is the first year that Xpey' is entirely Indigenous Focused, with 5 Indigenous teachers, an Indigenous Resource Teacher, an Indigenous Education Worker, and other staff that have expressed their commitments to an Indigenous Focus.

This review of the Xpey' Indigenous Focus School was initiated by the Vancouver Board of Education, to generate answers to the questions below:

1. Is there still a will to support Xpey'?
2. How well we are doing on the things we set out to do based on the original vision?
3. What are the barriers to program growth and program success?
4. What attracts people to the school?
5. What are staff strengths and needed areas of improvement?
6. Does the school foster a sense of belonging and community?
7. What additional structures and supports need to be put in to place?



XPEU' REVIEW PARTICIPANTS



Xpey' Review Participants

The review process (Appendix 1) included people involved in the visioning, professionals involved during the transition from a conventional to an Indigenous focus, and people most involved in the school (aka stakeholders): administrators, teachers, support workers, support professionals, students and parents. Review participants were asked – in interviews, talking circles and an online survey (Appendix 2) - if the school was living up to the original vision, what they thought was working, what wasn't, and how things could be improved.

Participation

Review events took place between November 20, 2018 and February 15, 2019, and included interviews (24 people), 4 talking circles (40 people),

and an online survey (22 people). Some people participated in more than one event. In the current 2018-2019 school year, there are up to 79 students, 19 staff and 79+ family members interacting on any given day. 64 Xpey' stakeholders participated in interviews and/or talking circles. An additional 22 people participated in the online survey, bringing the total number of participants to 85. This gives us a participation rate of 45%. More people participated than expected, which resulted in some well-corroborated themes. Even so, other important themes may have been missed among those who did not participate. Table 2 displays the participation numbers and rates for students, families, staff and related professionals.

Table 2. Xpey' Review Participation

	Elders	Parents/ Family	Students	Teachers	Admin	Support/ Resource Workers	Indigenous Education Workers	Itinerant & External Professions	Totals
Interviews	1	3	2	4	2	6	1	5	24
Talking Circles	4	14	19	1		0	2		40
Surveys	1	15	0	2	1	1	1	1	22
Event Participation Totals	6	32	21	7	3	7	4	5	85
Xpey' Population Totals	0	79+	79	5	2	11	1	12+	189
Participation Rates (%)		41	27	100	100	64	100	42	45



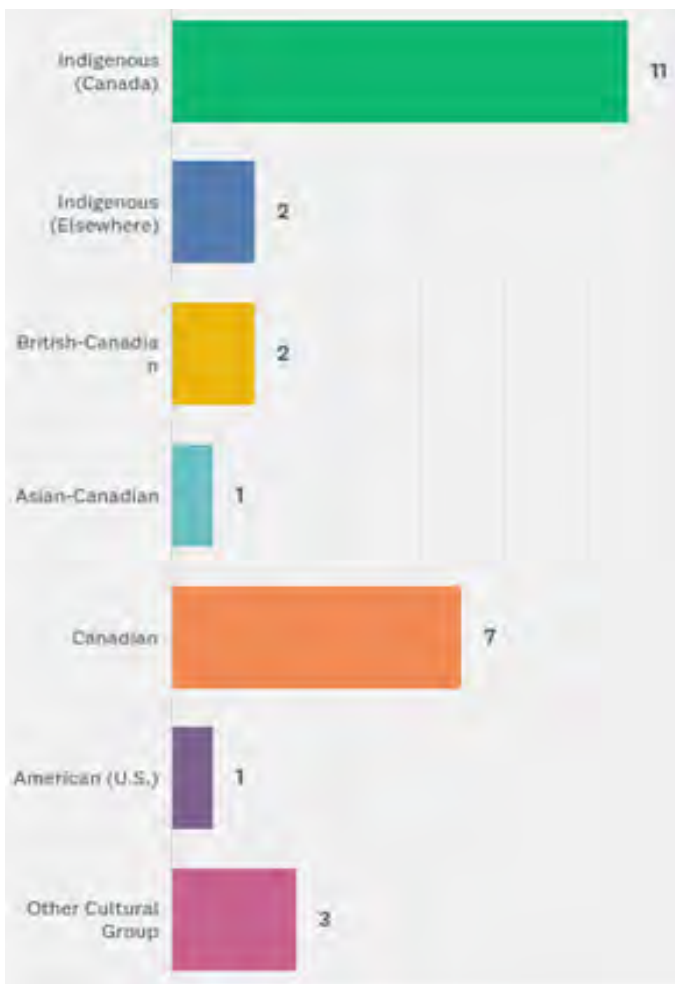


Figure 2. Response to Xpey' Review Survey Question 1. *Please share the cultural group(s) you identify with the most.*

Participant Identities

Identity is an important subject for many people, and has played a strong role since the first Indigenous Focus classroom in 2012. Some in the general public consider Xpey' to be just for Indigenous children, but the diversity among survey participants (Figure 2) confirms that people with other backgrounds feel welcome, and are interested in teaching and learning with an Indigenous focus. The diversity within the survey is similar to the diversity of people within the student population at Xpey' (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

Participant Roles

Survey participants also had the option of choosing the roles they played most in the lives of children attending Xpey' (Figure 3). Most of those who responded were Elders, parents, guardians, family and community members; the rest identified as staff. This

confirms what some parents and staff had relayed in messages, that they didn't have time to contribute to the review in person, but would complete the survey online. One of the five teachers wasn't available to participate at Xpey', but it's possible they were one of the 2 teachers who participated online.

Participant Locations

While most of the children, families and staff who attend, visit or work at Xpey' are active mostly in Vancouver, a high number of people are active throughout the Lower Mainland and beyond. Figure 4 shows where the 22 survey participants most live, work or play, and confirms that the Xpey' community is wide spread. This is relevant to review themes like inclusion of people from diverse Nations, access to the Indigenous Focus School within the Vancouver School District, timing of activities, potential Indigenous community expertise, the provision of before and after school programs, and bus services.

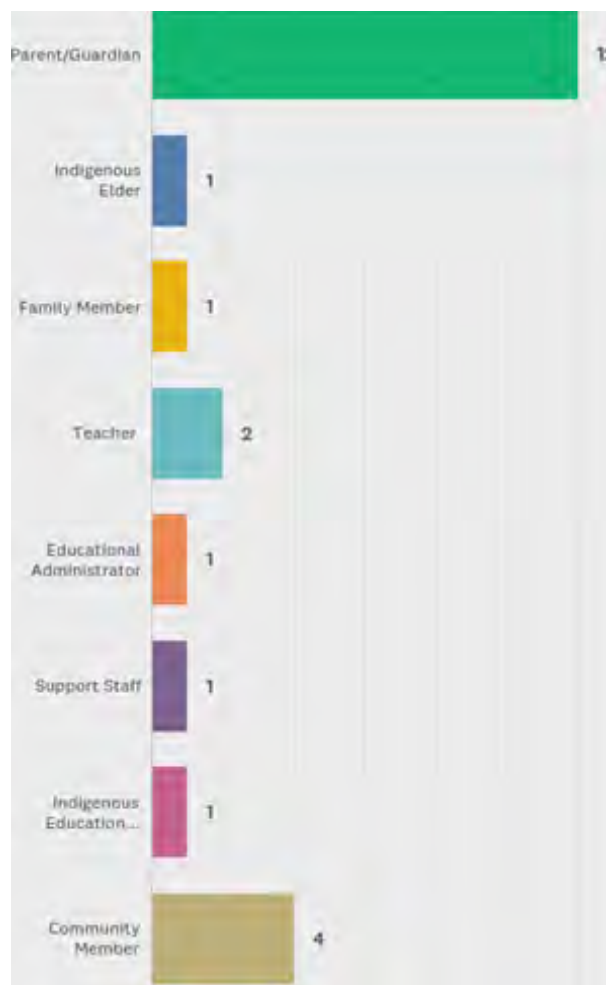


Figure 3. Response to Xpey' Review Survey Question 3. *Which roles do you play most in the lives of Xpey' children?*



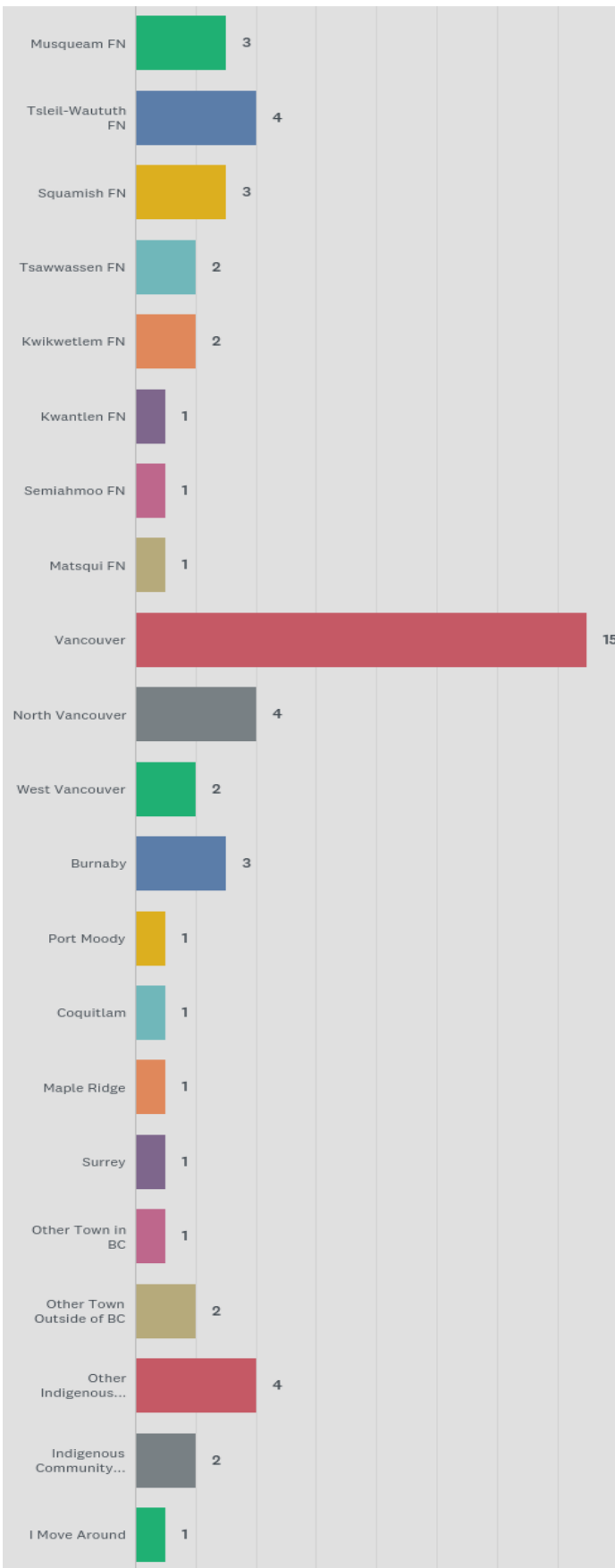


Figure 4. Response to Xpey' Review Survey Question 2: *Which town, First Nations (FN) or cities do you live, work and play in the most?*



XPEY' REVIEW FINDINGS: STRENGTHS



Xpey' Review Findings: Strengths

Empowered & Engaged Students, 100% Committed Staff

The three main goals of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement (AEEA, 2016) were:

- **Belonging:** to increase Aboriginal students' sense of pride, self-esteem, belonging, place, acceptance and caring in their schools
- **Mastery:** to ensure Aboriginal students achieve increased academic success in Vancouver schools and that they participate fully and successfully from kindergarten through the completion of Grade 12, and
- **Culture and Community:** to increase knowledge, awareness, appreciation of, and respect for Aboriginal histories, traditions, cultures and contributions by all students through eliminating institutional, cultural and individual racism within the Vancouver school district learning communities.

Figure 5 indicates that the majority of survey participants believe there is a medium to strong sense of belonging or community at Xpey'. The School is an amazing example of how creating an Indigenous focus can empower the identities, critical thinking and self-determination of students from diverse backgrounds. Students are invited to smudge, to acknowledge the people of the land, to self identify and speak during inclusive talking circles, to learn about Indigenous histories, language and culture. The front door welcomes people with a beautifully carved Indigenous design, and the walls and classroom are adorned with Indigenous art pieces by well-known artists and students.



Figure 5. Response to Xpey' Review Question 11. *How developed is the sense of belonging or community at the Xpey' Elementary School?*



When I ask a student what they're learning, they'll tell me. It's really wonderful here. And the attendance is high, which says something about the safety, the engagement, the land-based learning, the story-telling. These children feel safe here; our challenge is to measure that (Interviewee).



Figure 6. Responses to Xpey' Review Survey Question 8. *How well has Xpey' fostered confidence, respect, critical thinking and engagement among learners?*

Family members meet and chat each morning in the Blue room over coffee and the PAC has been very active advocating for the students and school. Figure 6 portrays what families, staff and other educators thought about how well Xpey' staff are fostering respect, critical thinking and engagement among learners. Since its beginning as a mini-school, students, staff, families and community members have asked for more Indigenous staff, to develop the Indigenous focus, and ensure that the Indigenous histories, knowledge and practices were being taught appropriately. Each year, more and more Indigenous staff were hired, alongside non-Indigenous colleagues. As of 2018, all of the teachers, the Indigenous education worker, and some of the support staff have Indigenous backgrounds, and everyone is 100% committed to the academic excellence and social-emotional wellbeing of the students. Several staff reported working overtime, spending money on supplies, and personal time on preparing activities. Table 3 shows ideal teacher characteristics identified as critical for implementation of the Indigenous Focus. During interviews, talking circles and online surveys, review participants repeatedly confirmed that teachers were demonstrating these characteristics at Xpey'.

Focus Elementary School, there has been a growing number of students, and proportion of Indigenous students, attending Xpey'. According to review participants, Indigenous people are often more mobile than average Canadians, which has resulted in the majority of Xpey' registrations happening closer to September, to ensure the best fit for their children and family situation. Despite low early registrations, this growth trend is a particularly good indication of how well Xpey' is doing. Figure 7 displays this growth trend. In summary, the strengths of the Xpey' Indigenous Focus School, were reportedly that staff, students and families have worked together to meet all

Staff work extremely hard to Indigenousize the focus school with very little resources. Considering the lack of support, they do an absolutely amazing job (Survey Participant).

During the 7 years of transition from one Indigenous focused classroom to a full Indigenous

Table 3. Ideal Teacher Characteristics (Archibald et al, 2011).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develops effective learning relationships with students, recognizes students' talents and strengths ➤ Demonstrates care and patience toward students, listens intently ➤ Has high expectations of students and challenges them to do their best ➤ Has knowledge, experience, and commitment for using Aboriginal knowledge in pedagogy and curriculum, understands the impact of colonization on Aboriginal people, and uses strategies to decolonize education; ➤ Is an expert in subject areas and uses varied pedagogy ➤ Is aware and knowledgeable of urban Aboriginal contexts.



together to meet all of the goals of the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement including fostering self esteem, a sense of belonging, and pride in the school, academic engagement and success, and have increased knowledge and respect among students and staff for Indigenous histories and cultures, invited cultural contributions

by individual students, engaged students where they're at, supported family involvement through the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), and have demonstrated a growing number of students, including Indigenous students, over the last 7 years.



Figure 7 shows a growth trend to higher enrolment and higher numbers of Indigenous students.



XPEY' REVIEW

FINDINGS: CHALLENGES



Xpey' Review Findings: Challenges

Acknowledging the 7-Year Struggle from Mini-School to a Full

As Figure 8 suggests, most of the survey participants thought that Xpey' was approaching, meeting, fully meeting or exceeding the original goals for an Indigenous Focus School; however, there were still some who thought that Xpey' was not yet meeting the original goals. All of the areas reported to need improvement in the 2013 community consultation (Neufeld et al, 2016) were reported to still need improvement during this review. This lag in improvements is surprising given participant reports of years of lobbying for assistance at the District and Board levels. This suggests that parents and staff expect the Indigenous Focus School to exceed the goals of the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement. For survey participants, the top two priorities were funding for Indigenous content and engagement with Indigenous communities. Figure 9 provides a graph of these key areas.



Figure 8. Response to Xpey' Review Survey Question 4. *How well is the Xpey Elementary School doing, in general?*

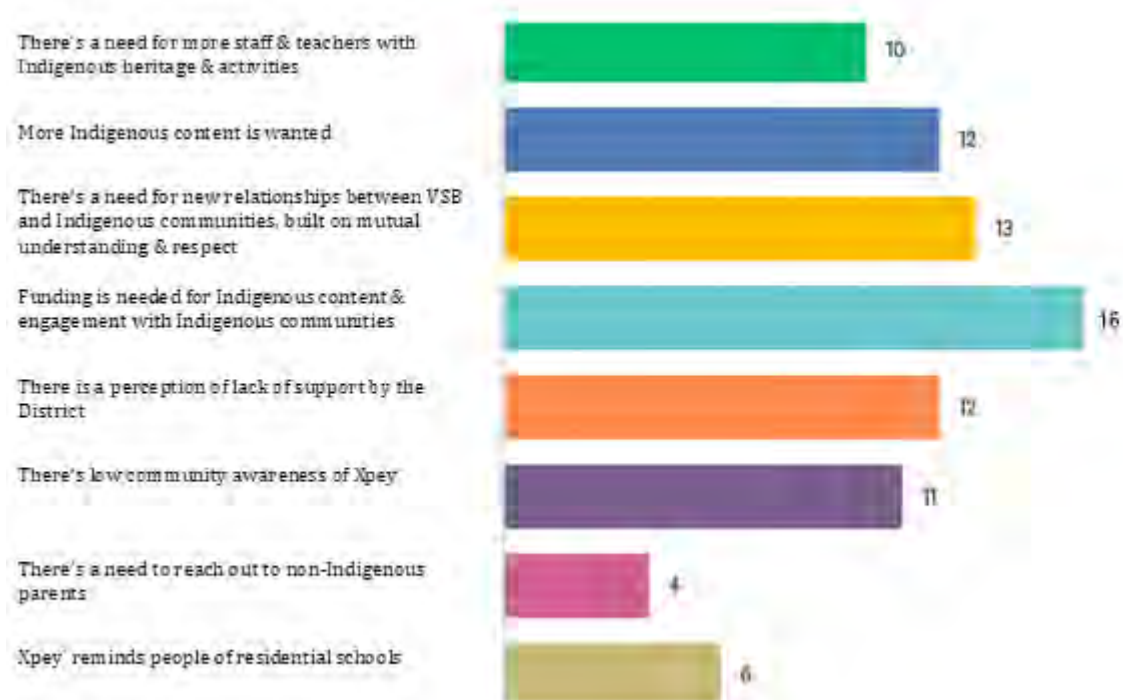


Figure 9. Response to Xpey' Review Survey Question 10. *In the last review...which areas still need work?*



Throughout the review there was a lot of consistency about how to complete the transformation from a mini-school to a full Indigenous focused school of academic excellence; these consistent recommendations, can be called themes. Themes can be verified and ranked by mechanically counting the number of times key words are used. The word frequency table (Table 4) shows a ranking of themes by key word count within transcripts of interviews, talking circles and surveys (196 pages). Though dependent on which words you search for, this ranking can provide a general understanding of what was most important to Xpey’ stakeholders, as a community. A more detailed table can be found in Appendix 3.

Another way to find out how Xpey’ School was doing, was to find out which original goals for creating an Indigenous Focus were most important at the time of this review. To do this, the 29 statements within the original visioning mind map (Archibald et al, 2011) were listed in the survey, and participants were asked to choose the top 10. Table 5 (next page) provides a list of the top ten

topics considered most important to survey participants. The themes in the top ten are similar to the top themes in the frequency table; this duplication confirms the validity of the themes.

Since these recommendations were reportedly still outstanding after 7 years, I had to look deeper and ask, what are the possible barriers to ensuring these things are addressed or implemented, towards making Xpey’ the School of Excellence that was hoped for?

The following section provides a summary of statements made during 24 interviews, 4 talking circles with 40 Elders, parents, staff & students, and 22 online surveys with past and present staff, and family members. The topic areas are presented in the order of priority, as indicated in Table 4. This summary is filled in with details from Vancouver Board of Education documents, community consultation reports, and PAC correspondence shared with me as the independent reviewer. Citations for these documents can be found in the Reference section.

Table 4. Ranked Themes by Word Count

Theme & Priority	Key Word Count
1. <i>Foster Academic Excellence</i>	2924
2. <i>More Indigenous Teachings</i>	1967
3. <i>Less Authoritarian & More Indigenous Approaches</i>	1826
4. <i>Acknowledge Staff Strengths, Address Staff Challenges</i>	1512
5. <i>Address Number of Special Needs Students</i>	1061
6. <i>More Land-Based Learning, Sports & Playground Upgrading</i>	579
7. <i>Improve Relationships with VSB Decision-Makers</i>	548
8. <i>More Before & After School Programs</i>	489
9. <i>More Funding or Upgraded Resources, Supplies & Equipment</i>	369
10. <i>Increase Indigenous “Look & Feel” & Address Building Concerns</i>	208
11. <i>Continue Food Programs with Some Changes</i>	76
12. <i>Get an Xpey’ Bus</i>	48
13. <i>Improve Responses to Bullying</i>	25



Table 5. Top ten responses to Xpey' Review Survey Question 9 (by number of votes). Check the top 10 topics (out of 29) that are most important to you.

The environment (relationship to land and notions of place)	15
Indigenous world views	15
Elders	13
Empowerment of children, families and community	13
Enhancement workers as a resource	10
Learning together	10
Indigenous community involvement	10
Re/Connecting with Indigenous cultures	9
Indigenous pride	9
Meeting students at level they're at	9

1. Foster Academic Excellence

As indicated in Table 4, academic success was the top theme of this review, by word count within all transcriptions. However, it was not a stand-alone concept, and was always paired during discussions alongside Indigenous approaches, teachings and land-

[Providing] diversity in education while maintaining interactive learning and sound academic development is the key (Survey Participant).

based learning. For the majority of review participants, the expectation seems to be that if an Indigenous focus is accomplished, that students will become fully engaged learners, their interests will be supported and academic success will be achieved.

Create more systemic programming - like an InSTEM, STEM or STEAM so the school can become a place of innovation and truly honour land based connections (Interviewee).

2. More Indigenous Teachings

There are no Indigenous Elders on staff at Xpey'. Participants repeatedly stated that Elders are essential to the teaching of Indigenous knowledge, traditions and practices. Staff and students asked for knowledgeable Elders and community people to be present on a daily basis, to provide ongoing counsel, share Indigenous teachings and processes, work on Indigenous projects, speak and teach the hən'q'əmin'əm' language, mentor events and protocols, create a more caring environment with the presence of "grandparents," and generally increase the sense of connectedness with Indigenous community. Parents recommended that Xpey' families be asked if they'd like to share their Indigenous knowledge and skills at the school

Elders need to be involved, e.g. with resources to bring them in, with acknowledgement of knowledge, e.g. through honorarium equity; need a system for integrating Indigenous curriculum and cultural programming, e.g. family based; staff need opportunities to build relationships, work together and get to know each other (Interviewee).



and to create a way for all classrooms to have an open door policy for families to assist and participate in learning.

Several review participants suggested that Xpey' focus on the Musqueam language (hən'q'əmin'əm'), so that children could become fluent in the language of the land by the end of grade 12, since Indigenous languages could fulfill second language requirements at BC universities. They also said it was important to offer other language learning opportunities, including the Indigenous and French languages of the student population, in class, on the computers, and in home learning kits.

The primary intent of these recommendations seemed to be for the school to really commit to an Indigenous focus, by organizing the School day so that the Musqueam language and diverse Indigenous learning experiences – land-based learning, Indigenous sciences, sports and cultural arts – were prioritized alongside more conventional, yet Indigenous informed, classroom-based learning about language, mathematics, science, history, health & fitness.

3. Less Authoritarian & More Indigenous Approaches

Authoritarian, competitive, labeling, coercive, patronizing or other forms of oppression are reminiscent of residential schools and can affect the emotional well being of children and their families, with lifelong effects. These topics were raised throughout the review process. One practice in particular, a system that charts behaviour and rewards good behaviour, was mentioned by a couple people in the community and the school, as an example of a western practice that is designed to motivate through visual cues and competition, but can result in children feeling shamed and parents deciding not to enroll their children. According to one staff member, this practice has been particularly upsetting for students with special needs.

During the review interviews it was mentioned several times that staff at Xpey' - Indigenous and non-Indigenous - are diverse in their backgrounds, with more or less knowledge or experience of Indigenous language and traditions, and with more or less use of authoritarian teaching methods. This was usually followed by statements that staff can't be

[We] need to move away from assimilative practices of work and move towards implementing a decolonizing framework. Integrate traditional knowledge and teachings (Interviewee).

expected to know everything, and that staff should work together to fill in the gaps. When staff made suggestions to shift to more inclusive or cooperative Indigenous approaches, or questioned the appropriateness of authoritarian practices within an Indigenous Focus School, some teachers reportedly used the concept of professional autonomy to justify exclusion of Indigenous content, approaches,

Choir! I've seen children crying and refusing to go to choir. When this observation was mentioned to a non-Indigenous mother she said her child "hated it". When it was mentioned to an Indigenous parent, they said their child did not like it either, both parents agreed that a class teaching Indigenous songs and drumming would be better. And would also reflect the intention of having an Indigenous Focus School (Survey Participant).

personnel, or new ideas, within classrooms. Professional autonomy is entrenched in Article F20 of the (BCTF) Provincial and Local Matters Collective Agreement (2013-2019), however some

Many have been upfront and said "can we talk about this professional autonomy, it's driving me crazy". There's a call by the majority of staff that we need to work collectively together...we can't have someone espousing professional autonomy, maybe they need to go to another school. That's not even aligned with the beliefs of Indigenous people. It's about community (Interviewee).



staff felt it should not be used as a barrier to working more collaboratively, or incorporating more Indigenous approaches and content, especially in an Indigenous Focus School.

4. Acknowledge Staff Strengths, Address Staff Challenges

The original rationale for gradually adding Indigenous focused classrooms and Indigenous teachers, was thought to be that teachers could innovate in their classrooms and collaborate on school wide activities, and that professionalism and respect for diversity would grant a smooth transition. During the 7 years of operation, there was a high turnover of staff, including a high turnover of Principals (including an Indigenous Principal).

I don't think, really, they were given time and funding to actually do that curriculum planning and to do the phased-in implementation (Interviewee).

Participants reported that there was no comprehensive transition plan or school-wide orientation for phasing in the Indigenous focus. With no transition plan or Indigenous focus plan and a high staff turnover, staff members reported experiencing a lot of change without strategic supports, training or ground rules for implementing an Indigenous Focus. According to some interviewees, this resulted in a lot of conflict, factionalism and alienation, as some tried to hold on to established practices, while others tried to introduce more Indigenous focused practices, while newcomers from outside the district tried to introduce new ideas, and while local staff members tried to maintain the approaches they believed in.

With a high turnover of Principals, the Xphey staff reported they were left to establish their own order as new Principals “came up to speed”; consequently, the staff committee meetings became the primary site for Xphey’ decision-making and new Principals and general staff meetings were treated as temporary or secondary to the staff committee meetings. The use of Robert’s Rules of Order was reported as particularly divisive and disempowering to some staff members, and

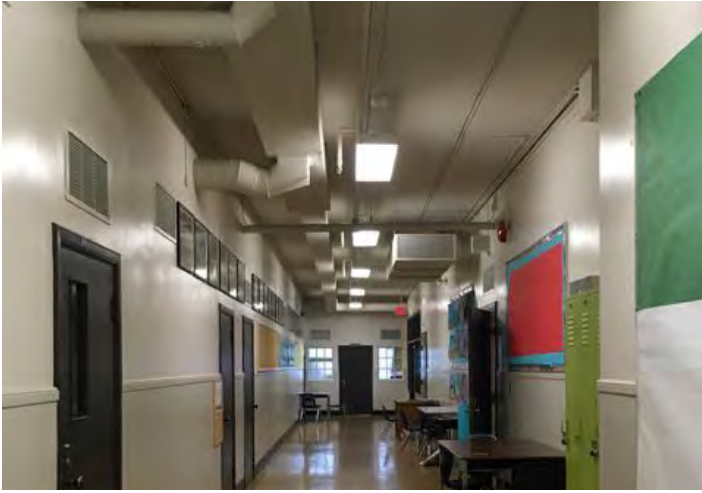
contrary to Indigenous approaches that ensure inclusive dialogue and decision-making. Other staff cited VSB recommendations to employ Robert’s Rules of Order. When excluded by Robert’s Rules, some staff reported choosing to not to attend meetings.

Recommendations by some of the staff included replacing Robert’s Rules of Order with Talking Circle Protocol, to ensure open and inclusive dialogue by all staff at both staff meetings and staff committee meetings. Student support workers expressed not having a voice in the school due to not having voting privileges at the more powerful staff committee meetings; this was said to be alleviated somewhat by the arrival of the current Principal, who had an open door policy and re-instituted school wide staff meetings, as well as attending and providing information at staff committee meetings. Over the years, several people had suggested healing ceremonies or mediation but these ideas were vetoed through Roberts Rules of Order. Review participants echoed these suggestions, and some suggested that major team building efforts are needed, along with healing ceremonies, strategic planning and orientations, to “clear the air” and get everyone “on the same page”. It was suggested that late August or t

The staff aren't feeling safe, there's racism and lateral violence, e.g. rolling of eyes, turning backs, body language; the white way among core group dominates, e.g. Roberts Rules at staff committee meetings, decision-making without Indigenous staff; Indigenous staff are tired or stressed about the divisions; my culture was squashed, so I stopped sharing (Interviewee).

he first week in September would be good timing, especially in light of statements that several more staff were moving on over the summer. These conflicts reportedly left staff feeling unsafe, oppressed, disempowered and unheard on all sides, but still determined to facilitate excellent learning activities that integrated Indigenous histories,





knowledge and practices with conventional curricula and practices. To the staff credit, most of the families involved in the review praised the staff, and gave no indications that they were concerned about their performance. As an educational professional, I was a witness to the professionalism between staff during Thursday and Friday interactions, which demonstrated their commitment to not let inter-staff conflicts affect their work or relationships with the children and families.

5. Address Number of Special Needs Students

Due to historical and continuing socio-economic, health, and educational inequities, continuing racism and clashes of worldview, Indigenous populations have experienced a higher incidence of children with special needs. In 2016, the VSB reported that 37% of the Indigenous population had special needs compared with 8% of the non-Indigenous population, and that Indigenous students had more behavioural needs (51% higher) than the non-Indigenous students, who had more sensory, learning or gifted needs (40-88% higher). According to the same report, Indigenous students made up 4.2% (2177) of the student population in the Vancouver School District. This means that the Xpey' School should be prepared to support up to 37% of Indigenous students with both designated and undiagnosed special needs. There is reportedly a district formula for allocating support staff, but it's considered ineffective by review participants when applied to schools with high Indigenous populations, because Indigenous populations are more mobile than average Canadians, and often

don't register before allocations are made, meaning every year there is an influx of "unexpected" students, with "unexpected needs". This has resulted in a stressful situation where teachers at Xpey' reportedly have more special needs students than the limit of 3 allowed within union agreements. Review participants have reported up to 5, 7 or 13 children with special needs in a classroom, with some students needing but not getting one-on-one support. Teachers are reportedly asked to sign letters of agreement to allow higher numbers of students with special needs in their classroom. There are only 5 full-time and 2 part-time student support workers at Xpey', 1 full-time child and youth worker, and a counselor two days a week; this is considered inadequate by staff to address and support special education needs and requires "sharing" of student support workers to maintain basic support.

To make this high stress environment functional, the teachers, admin and support staff stay in constant cell phone communication to facilitate quick shifts in supports throughout the school as needed, which includes supports in class, in smaller study rooms, in more relaxing settings, with the child and youth worker, with the Indigenous Education Worker, with the counselor, and occasionally with the Principal, 2 full-time and 1 part-time resource workers. The School-based team has met regularly to strategize, to ensure basic support needs are met, and the District Urgent Care team is called in for temporary assistance and rapid assessments when needed. Some have expressed concern with the quality of education for all students in this high needs situation, including the fear

What keeps people away is that all of our classes have too many special needs students in them and families fear that their child (whether they have a designation or not) will not get an adequate level of support to grow socially or academically (Interviewee).

that Xpey' has become a "dumping ground" for children with special needs. The conundrum is that staff and families profess a dislike of labels for students, because it can lower expectations, and many have said they don't want to turn any students away, yet teachers and support workers are experiencing burnout, taking many sick leaves, and moving on



to other positions. When staff are absent or on leave, substitute workers need to be brought in; this has reportedly lead to disruptions in Individual Education Plans and disturbances in student stability, which led to heightened behaviours and triggering of other student behaviours.

Way too many substitute teachers for Elementary level. I feel inconsistency in the class room, too many different teachers coming in as well as those that come in for special needs (Survey Participant).

Reports of high numbers of students with special needs, with inadequate numbers of support staff, with high staff turnovers, has reportedly resulted in a school reputation of being unruly, unsafe and understaffed. This reputation has reportedly reduced the willingness of staff on call to work at Xpey', and one past staff member said they'd never work there again. Many of the staff reported that the situation had improved over the last year. These issues require some complex problem solving and a unique Indigenous special education plan or formula, to ensure that teachers are adequately supported and so that all students can succeed academically and socially.

6. More Land-Based Learning, Sports & Playground Upgrading

Xpey' doesn't have any sports programs, or any grass fields to sit or play on and only a few swings. In a talking circle with students, the priorities were to create sports teams, have more field trips, and create a better playground with grass, trees, more swings, monkey bars, spinny things, a larger garden, and even a zipline. Students suggested more Indigenous arts and games, like lahal, singing, drumming and lacrosse. They also asked for more outdoor learning, including overnight trips, medicinal plant walks, berry picking, learning to survive off the land, walking in the forest, kayaking and greater involvement in current Indigenous issues.

7. Improve Relationships with VSB Decision-Makers

Review participants expressed some fatigue about sharing their perspectives in another review, because their interests and concerns had already been documented during the original consultation and during several reviews, and they had made every effort, written emails, presented to the Board, lobbied trustees and staff, and even talked to the press, to try and make the desired changes, with little action. Several review participants reported strained relationships and distrust of district personnel or the school board, because of the lack of action or dedicated supports for an Indigenous focus, land-based learning or Elders at Xpey'.



Participants also expressed some hope that the timing was right for more focused planning, training and funding, given the growing awareness of Indigenous histories and traumas, and resulting socio-economic disadvantages. Staff and family members were very aware of important government initiatives to support Indigenous education, including the Indian Control of Indian Education paper (1972), the Constitution Act (1982), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2006), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action (2015). All of these high profile investigations asserted the rights of Indigenous people to continue practicing Indigenous life ways, and to be leaders in the development of Indigenous education, towards Indigenous definitions of success.



The stories documented in the review process seemed to be shared with the hope that the depth and breadth of the issues would be represented, so that the calls for reconciliation could finally be

If we could have more of VSB support and help with more funding and letting more knowledge of the school out to the public. We then could start feeling like we belong (Survey Participant).

answered, through strategic problem-solving, resources, new approaches, and planning. The underlying goal seemed to be a transformation of the Xpey' Indigenous Focus School, into a school of both academic and cultural excellence, with learning in both land-based and school-based settings, with the freedom to innovate, teach and learn, in safe and nurturing environments.

During the survey, participants indicated that funding was the primary barrier to becoming an Indigenous Focus School of Excellence. Review participants suggested that if the Board of Education, or District couldn't find funds, that at least a Vice Principal, or Community Coordinator could be hired on a full-time basis, to develop partnerships, funding and service proposals with local agencies, to increase the sense of community, manage volunteers, Elders and community instructors, improve the School's reputation, advertise, recruit students, and secure funds for the development of Indigenous approaches

We tend to hear that the community already receives more than enough support. So, again, our voices are erased and marginalized in what seems more like gas-lighting than anything else (Survey Participant).

and resources at the School. Several parents asserted the need for a guiding council, to guide the Indigenous focus, set the objectives and help to secure funds, with more connection with the Indigenous education department.

8. More Before & After School Programs

Staff, students and parents all asked for more Indigenous programming at Xpey', including clubs and community courses in the morning, after school or during lunch time. Many staff and families recalled the original recommendation to expand the School to include high school grades, community services, community courses and adult learning, and suggested this may address some of the financial pressures the school faces, while creating a community hub for Indigenous learning.

Indigenous leadership by parents, family and community. A board or council to teach and guide the school would be useful. "Nothing about us without us" (Survey Participant).

Before and after school childcare programs were considered essential to providing access to the school for employed parents travelling from further away, especially without a school bus system. Many review participants queried why the after school program was cancelled at the last minute, and commented that it had caused a lot of hardship for families while trying to find new programs for their children, adjusting their family and travel arrangements. Xpey' staff helped with finding programs, and have been providing some assistance with transfers between Xpey' and before and after school facilities.

Staff and parents both praised the fall opening of the Blue room to parents, to share news and talk over tea or coffee. Several people recommended that the room be opened on a full-time basis and transformed with the addition of regular coffee and snacks, couches, notice boards, and a computer.

9. More Funding or Upgraded Resources, Supplies & Equipment

Both staff and students mentioned that the old donated computers were very out of date and that there were only two older iPads for use by students. Several staff mentioned that the library space and resources weren't accessible, primarily because it was also doubling as a private office space. Some envisioned a more interactive library with programs, more Indigenous resource kits and full access by both staff and children.





10. Increase the Indigenous “Look & Feel” & Address Building Concerns

We need newer equipment, e.g. laptops, which can help with writing; we need more Indigenous resources and better access to the library (Interviewee).

Both staff and family recommended a redesign of the exterior and interior spaces to reflect more Indigenous approaches and activities, and to essentially create an Indigenous “look and feel”, such as use of cedar planks to give a longhouse feel, and inclusion of a fire pit, water area and native plants, and ideally a sweat lodge.

Several building concerns were mentioned. In the fall of 2015 the seismic upgrading decision was revised from immediate action, to 35th in line, then to 10th in line; both of these positions meant seismic upgrades would have been completed by the by the end of the 2017-2018 school year. As of February 2019, the School was 73rd from the end of the

Vancouver line (out of 83) for seismic upgrading, as a “future priority.” 26 schools have already been upgraded, 7 are under construction, 8 are in business case development, and 42 are considered future priorities (Appendix 5).

So, it really just comes down to funding and the lack of funding. But, also it's a person to organize. Who is going to take on that organizational role? (Interviewee).

The most common comment about the building was that it was reminiscent of residential schools with its old, tall imposing brick walls, windowless classroom doors, empty hallways, poor basement lighting, uneven flooring, low basement ceilings, and layout of the basement rooms which all added to the school’s sense of “creepiness”. Several people professed having residential school memories triggered, with feelings of darkness, evil or dread when entering the school.



Additional concerns included questions about lead in the water and paint, safety of the drinking water (staff taps were to be run for 5 minutes), asbestos in the building materials and desks, a lack of safety screens for the second floor windows, and a lack of cleanliness of the building. Some suggested that the age of the building, walls, flooring and ceilings, might make it look dirtier than it is. No asbestos reports were available; however some staff understood that if the asbestos was undisturbed, that people were safe. The most recent water report (2016) shows lead levels at rates considered acceptable by Health Canada (Appendix 6).

For some parents or caregivers Xpey' may remind them about the negative experience of their grandparents or parents, of residential school and therefore, prevents them from enrolling their children at Xpey' (Interviewee).

11. Continue Food Programs with Some Changes

One of the ongoing successes of the school was reported to be the food program, where students are provided with breakfast, lunch and snacks on a daily basis. While the food wasn't praised by participants, it may address part of what Dr. Fiddler called the "social determinants of education," and may ensure that children living in lower income situations have

the nutrition they need to focus and engage in educational activities throughout the day. Local agencies reportedly make donations of milk and food, that parents can take home with them, and occasionally a cooking class is done with students.

Definitely more cultural foods and how to make it, especially soap berries, eulachon grease, and bannock (Student Talking Circle).

A couple of recommendations to improve this program included the regular addition of Indigenous foods in the breakfasts and lunches, and more opportunities to learn about Indigenous foods and medicines on the land. There was also a recommendation that the cafeteria sign be changed to reflect the school, rather than the name of a past cook.

12. Get an Xpey' Bus

As a Program of Choice, students from within the catchment area are given priority registration, while students from anywhere in the district can apply for registration. However, Xpey' hasn't had a bus system to pick up and return students from across Vancouver, so (according to review participants) some families could not to send their children to Xpey' for



transportation reasons.

The other obstacle is the lack of transportation, some parents may want to enroll their child or children but public transportation can be complicated, so there is need to have school bus (Interviewee).

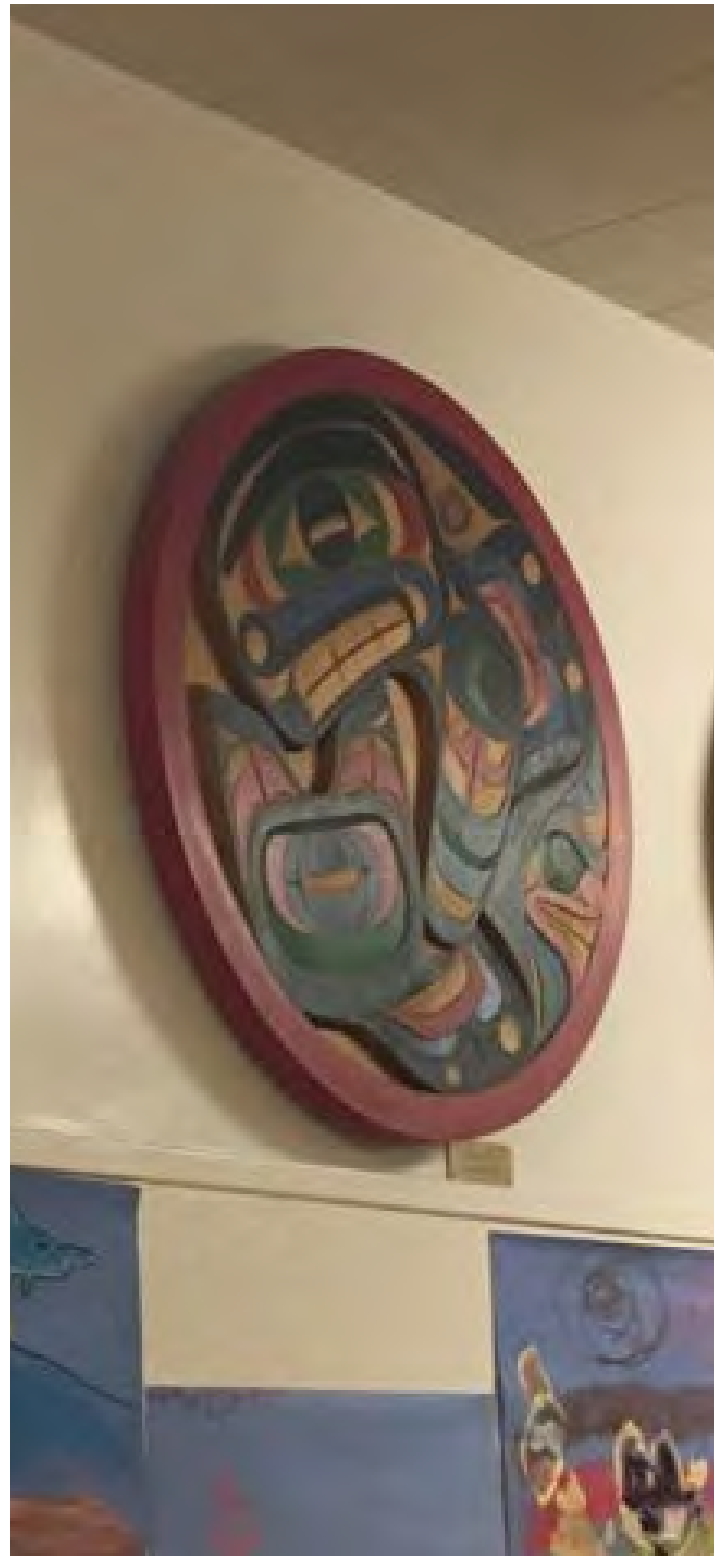
Participants also reported a lack of land-based activities and partially blamed this on not having a designated bus and driver. According to staff, Xpey' can apply for use of District buses for field trips, but the school does not have the funding to pay for frequent use of buses for learning on the land.

13. Improve Responses to Bullying

Several review participants were concerned about bullying at the school and felt that the response – to remove and entertain misbehaving children in the Principal's office - was inadequate. Others felt that the inadequate staffing meant children with behavioral issues could prey on other children without consequence. In contrast, some said that staff responded quickly to altercations, and work to de-escalate situations, to prevent harm, to address the reasons for the altercations, and to focus on modifying the behaviour rather than on punishing the child. It's clear that the response to bullying needs to be discussed and clarified among staff, children and families.

Some children are afraid of getting bit by kids that can't control their anger. Once a child does something like that they should be removed immediately. The injured child shouldn't be in the same room with someone who hurt them (Survey Participant).

There's a lack of prevention for bullying and lack of mental health help offered to those who do experience bullying (Survey Participant).



CONCLUSIONS



Conclusions

After 7 years of transition from a regular school to a full Indigenous Focus School, Xpey' Elementary has just emerged from an unintended experiment in cross-cultural negotiations for control over the Indigenous focused education of children. As the proportion of Indigenous children increased, so did the proportion of students with special needs. Pre-existing methods of decision-making (Robert's Rules of Order) and staff allocations (District funding formula) reportedly resulted in some difficult growing pains with burnout and a high turnover of staff. Funding formulas for this new Indigenous Focus School reportedly did not match the goals of the school to integrate land-based learning, Elders, Indigenous languages, and Indigenous teachings by community knowledge holders.

Despite challenges, Xpey' Elementary School has shown a trend towards a growing number of students, and a growing proportion of Indigenous students. The main priority, according to review participants, was to foster academic excellence at Xpey' through Indigenous teachings and approaches, and by addressing funding shortages. According to survey participants, the majority of students have been assisted to approach, meet, fully meet or exceed expectations for demonstrating confidence, respect, critical thinking and engagement. A large part of this is attributed, by families, to the 100% commitment of staff, and to the integration of Indigenous knowledge, language, protocols and teachings into most school activities. Coincidentally, as the school has grown in Indigenous Focus, so has it built a sense of community or belonging, as families have gathered in the Blue room, at PAC meetings, at Board meetings and at school events.

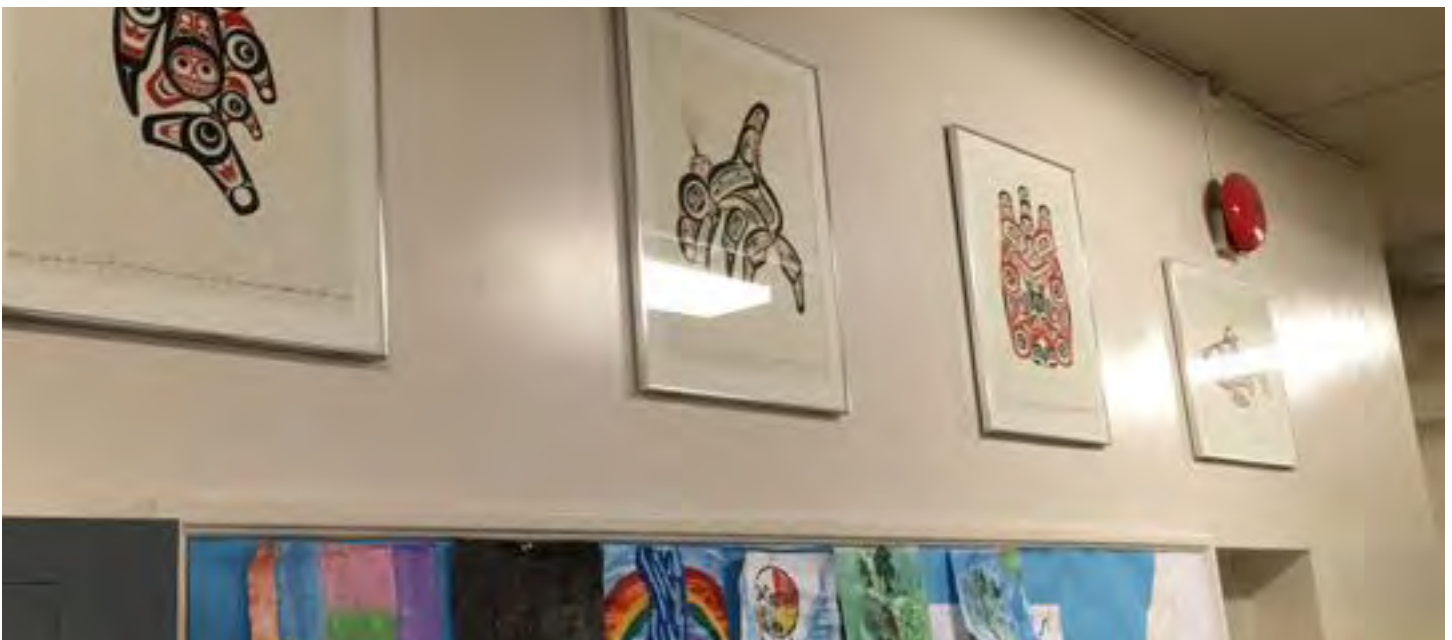
Forum participants repeatedly voiced that they would like the VSB to "think bigger" and strive to reach more Aboriginal students. Those who spoke to the issue of scope wanted to see the creation of an entire school, not just a school within a school. Many participants wanted to see the new school focus on all grades, K-12 (Archibald et al, 2011).

Now that Xpey' is a complete Indigenous Focus School, VSB has delivered on the dream of an Indigenous school, which brings it to a new horizon, where teaching and learning with Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing can blossom, and can be extended to students in higher grades. The advantage is that lessons have been learned, and with everyone on the same page, the invitation to high school students will be a welcoming and empowering process for all, as new staff and students are integrated into the Xpey' Indigenous Focused School of Excellence, with a strong community of supporters.



Answers to original VSB review questions

1. **Is there still a will to support Xpey'?** Yes! While there's some fatigue from 7 years of transition, there is still a strong will by staff and parents to support the only Indigenous Focus school in the Vancouver School District
2. **How well we are doing on the things we set out to do based on the original vision?** Staff have made some great successes and have implemented the original vision with no extra planning, funding or personnel, including integrating Indigenous histories, knowledge and practices into the classrooms, creating safety and respect for diverse identities, accepting and supporting students where they're at, resulting in high attendance rates and improvements in social-emotional behavior.
3. **What are the barriers to program growth and program success?** The barriers are due to past stigmas of a rough Macdonald School, the reputation of not delivering on an Indigenous Focus, no planning or funding to set up the Indigenous Focus, too many students with special needs without a school-wide support plan, staff conflicts created by the phase-in process, insufficient involvement by the Indigenous Education department, and lack of a full-time driver and vehicle for land-based learning and transportation of students.
4. **What attracts people to the school?** People are attracted to the school because of the promise of an Indigenous Focus, and acceptance of students with special learning needs. People may not enroll because of lack of advertising, the school's reputation, an incomplete Indigenous focus, and transportation issues.
5. **What are staff strengths and needed areas of improvement?** The staff members are 100% committed despite divisions, and demonstrate care, interest, and patience with students on a daily basis. Staff members need work to be "on the same page", and to collaborate better on delivering the Indigenous Focus and Special Needs approaches, on a school-wide basis.
6. **Does the school foster a sense of belonging and community?** Despite barriers, the school has fostered, on average, a good sense of belonging and community.
7. **What additional structures and supports need to be put into place?** To get back on track, the priority should be the development of an Indigenous Focus Plan & Special Needs Plan, under the guidance of the Indigenous Education department, with adequate budgets, hiring criteria and staff orientation. Second, a bus and driver are needed to implement land-based learning. Finally, Xpey' needs a refit of the building, equipment and landscaping (or a new building).



RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendations

My vision is that in a few years students from Xpey can expand to an Indigenous high school, so students do not have to go through a difficult time to adjust to a regular high school. Finally, students - when they graduate - can walk proud of who they are, respecting others (Survey Participant).

The recommendations emerging from this review reflect 7 years of lessons learned, a desire to address the difficulties, and a desire to build on the successes. This includes addressing some key barriers to growth. The main recommendations and suggested strategies for this review are as follows:

- 1. Commit to Indigenous methodologies**
Suggested Strategies: talking circle methodologies, closer screening of Indigenous staff for fit & greater support by the Indigenous education department
- 2. Strengthen commitments to academic excellence and Indigenous focused learning.**
Suggested Strategies: develop an Indigenous Focus Plan, including commitments to school goals & ways of learning, provide Indigenous-focused professional development, provide skilled resident Elders, integrate Indigenous foods systems & Indigenous STEAM, commit to Indigenous languages and local Nations by focusing on hən'q'əmin'əm' for all students, hire a full-time hən'q'əmin'əm' instructor, develop or purchase diverse digital and home-study language kits.
- 3. Recognize population needs and strengthen commitments to empowered, engaged & strength-based learning.**
Suggested Strategies: create an Indigenous Learning Support Plan, with core funding for

culturally competent full-time staff, including Indigenous teachers, a full-time counselor, an Indigenous education worker, an Indigenous resource teacher, a librarian, and 2 student support workers per grade.

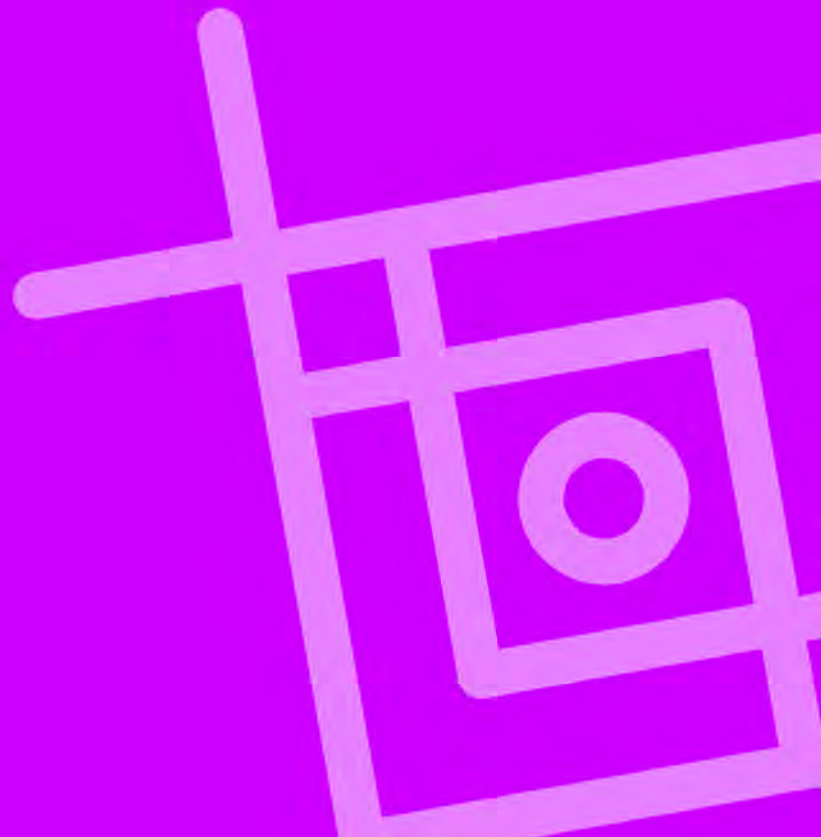
- 4. Strengthen the sense of community.** *Suggested Strategies:* create a full-time community room, develop extracurricular sports & increase school-based Indigenous events & opportunities for Indigenous-based healing and learning
- 5. Recognize & support equity & social determinants of learning**
Suggested Strategies: create school-based partnerships for funding, services & resources and dedicate a coordinator
- 6. Demonstrate environmental care**
Suggested Strategies: rebuild, relocate or address building concerns, redesign basement spaces, upgrade indoor & outdoor equipment and create an Indigenous look & feel
- 7. Commit to cross-boundary students & land-based learning**
Suggested Strategies: provide transportation

There are so many great approaches that the school board can do to support the school. To be authentic in the relationship, not tokenizing... And being sincere and looking at a long term contingency of really supporting this program, this initiative, in an untokenizing way. Not just making a small contribution, but looking at a 10, 20, 30 year goal of where they would like to see our young people in that true healthy reconciliation (Interviewee).

If these recommendations are followed, Xpey' should have no barriers to growth or excellence, and would be in a position to expand, towards the dream of a K-12 Indigenous Focus School.



REFERENCES



References



- ALS. (2016). Certificate of Analysis Lab Work Order #: L1767436. www.alsglobal.com. Retrieved from: https://www.vsb.bc.ca/_layouts/vsbwww/arch/default/files/water/MACDONALD.pdf
- Archibald, J., Raynor, A., & Big Head, R. (2011). Reporting on the Vancouver School District, January 2011 Aboriginal Education Forums Community Responses to Creating a School or Model with an Aboriginal Focus. Indigenous Education Institute of Canada: Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia.
- Canada, Department of Justice. (2012). A Consolidation of the Constitution Acts 1867 to 1982. Retrieved from: https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/pdf/const_e.pdf
- Canada. (2006). Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Retrieved from: <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/royal-commission-aboriginal-peoples/Pages/final-report.aspx>
- National Indian Brotherhood, Assembly of First Nations. (1972). Indian Control of Indian Education: Policy Paper Presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. Retrieved from: <https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf>
- Kitchenham et al. (n.d.). Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements: Complicated Conversations as Pathways to Success. Retrieved from: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/aboriginal-education/research/aeaa_report.pdf
- Ministry of Education. (2017). Aboriginal Report 2012/13 – 2016/17 How Are We Doing? School District 039. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/reports/ab-hawd/2016-ab-hawd-school-district-public.pdf>
- Neufeld, S., Schmitt, M., Hutchingson, V. (2016). The Aboriginal Focus School Vancouver, BC: A Community Research Report. Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296485818_The_Aboriginal_Focus_School_Vancouver_BC_A_Community_Research_Report
- Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012. (2015). Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Retrieved from: http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf
- United Nations. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf
- Vancouver Board of Education. (October 14, 2015). Committee Meeting Committee III – Education & Student Services. Grey Literature provided by VSB.
- Vancouver Board of Education. (October 11, 2015). Committee Meeting Committee III – Education & Student Services. Grey Literature provided by VSB staff
- Vancouver Board of Education. (October 26, 2015). Board Meeting Minutes. Grey Literature provided by VSB staff.



APPENDICES

- Appendix 1. Study Procedures*
- Appendix 2. Discussion Topic List*
- Appendix 3. Online Survey*
- Appendix 4. Word Frequency Table*
- Appendix 5. Seismic Upgrade List*
- Appendix 6. Water Report*



Appendix 1: Study Procedures

Indigenous Ethics

The key stakeholders within the Xpey' Indigenous Focus School are the staff, students, Elders, parents and families, and the majority are Indigenous. Outside of the school, the key stakeholders are the Indigenous community, local First Nations, Vancouver School Board, and Vancouver public, with the majority being non-Indigenous. Consequently, it was important to include both Indigenous methodologies, and to translate and document the findings of this review so that it was relevant to those with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews.

When working with Indigenous children and families, it's important to ensure that protocols and activities are done in a *good way*. The diversity in belief about what this means varies by Nation, community, individual, and context. In an urban area like Vancouver, where dozens of ancestries are represented, it's particularly complex. Even so, there are some general guidelines to encourage participation by people with diverse backgrounds, support Indigenous rights, and demonstrate cultural competency. Below are some of the Indigenous ethics applied in this project, which were informed by the Anishinaabek, and traditions learned while living in Coast Salish territories.

- Prepare to work by offering a smudge, prayer, tobacco and commitment to best efforts
- Approach people with respect and work to deepen trust, confidence and ongoing relationships
- Offer tobacco when requesting assistance
- Recognize the diversity among Indigenous people and their experiences
- Recognize the interconnectedness of all things and the responsibility for considering the potential effects of words and actions
- Recognize that traditional Indigenous worldviews are wholistic and value spirituality and emotions as much as physical and intellectual ways of being, knowing, and doing
- Be a good host or visitor, provide food, take of people, especially Elders and children. If possible, assist with travel.
- Be self-determining, respect the self-determination of others and work towards healthy and harmonious relationships
- Offer opportunities to begin and close events in a good way, by acknowledging the Nation of the people whose territory you're in, by inviting territorial Elders and people, by offering opportunities to engage in smudge or prayer, by facilitating inclusive and open communication (e.g. talking circles), and by expressing gratitude
- Acknowledge the wisdom of the Elders, cultural knowledge keepers, participants, and witnessing of events, through honorariums and token gifts
- Respect the environment and other beings by, as far as possible, reducing waste and use of polluting materials, using washable dishes, recycling & composting, selecting



healthy, local and responsibly sourced foods, limiting use of tree products, and by expressing gratitude.

Project Theory

This review combines Indigenous Wholistic Theory, Grounded Theory and Participatory Action Research as rationales for planning and implementing the review. Indigenous wholistic theory says that interconnected relationships are the key to understanding and requires inclusion of multiple domains of experience, including emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual. Grounded theory says that we can discover answers by letting them emerge from the data, rather than by limiting what answers we will accept. Participatory action research requires the participation of the people most relevant to the research (aka stakeholders), in decision-making, from initiation to completion of the project.

Project Questions

This review was initiated to discover answers to the following questions:

1. Is there still a will to support Xpey’?
2. How well we are doing on the things we set out to do based on the original vision?
3. What are the barriers to program growth and program success?
4. What attracts people to the school?
5. What are staff strengths and needed areas of improvement?
6. Does the school foster a sense of belonging and community?
7. What additional structures and supports need to be put in to place?

These questions were included in the online survey, and were summarized into more open-ended questions to invite more open ended answers:

How is Xpey’ Doing?
What Works?
What Doesn’t?
How Can Things Be Improved?

Project Methods

This review was planned to answer VSB questions in a short period of time, by providing diverse ways for Xpey’ Indigenous Focus School stakeholders (students, families & staff) to participate. The data collection methods included open-ended “interviews” or conversations, talking circle forums, and an anonymous online survey. Documentation and analysis methods included note-taking, audio-recording, automated transcription, and Survey Monkey graphing.

The Xpey’ Principal provided orientation to the school, made introductions and provided an office for conducting interviews on Thursdays and Fridays; two interviews took place



off-site. Interviews took place from November 20th to December 21st, 2018. Interview participants were offered tobacco, smudge, food & drink, and a small thank you gift.

A Discussion Topic List (Appendix 2) was created based on the information available at the start of the review. The list included visioning statements from a mind map developed during the community consultation, a list of findings from a 2014 community research study by Neufeld, Schmitt and Hutchingson (2016), and a list of review questions from VSB. This topic list was used to spark discussion during the interviews, and copies were given to talking circle participants.

Talking circle *rounds* focused on *what works, what doesn't, and how can things be improved*. Participants were invited to sign up for the contact list, and to indicate if they were okay with audio recordings. All interviews and talking circles were audio-recorded, and notes were taken.

Participants were offered smudge, food & drink, and a small thank you gift. In the school talking circles, the Indigenous Education Worker, Elder family member and Teacher were offered tobacco to open, assist and close the circles. In the public talking circle, a Coast Salish Elder was invited to open, assist and close the circle, and the Xpey' Elder family member was invited to speak.

The online survey included both the original VSB questions, and the generalized questions used in the interviews and talking circles. Demographic and identity information was collected from survey participants, to help aid in understanding who was participating, to ensure the perspectives of a wide variety of people were collected. Once the interviews, talking circles and surveys were completed, the text was combined into 193 pages of text. To generate initial story themes, the ideas were organized into groups by reflecting on the repetition and intensity of ideas, and by re-checking the transcripts.

Project Challenges & Learning Opportunities

The biggest challenge to this review was time, which limited background research, relationship building and review tool building. However, these limitations were reduced by the full support of the VSB Associate Superintendent, Indigenous Vice Principal, Xpey' Principal and Xpey' PAC Chair, who introduced the reviewer to people, provided an office at Xpey' for two days a week, provided feedback, helped problem solve, posted and sent out review invitations, encouraged participation, and provided school statistics, meeting notes, and leads for current research.



Appendix 2: Discussion Topic List

How is Xpey' Doing? What Works? What Doesn't? How Can Things Be Improved?

The Xpey' Indigenous Focus School Review will combine information from documents, interviews, talking circles and surveys to inform VSB decision-making. The review will be conducted between November 12th and March 31st. What topics are most important to you?

Beginning Vision	Past Review	VSB Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended family approach • Enhance workers as a resource • Physicality must be emphasized • Fine Arts • Draw on Elders as a resource • Environment (relationship to land and notions of place) • History • Celebrate and share Indigenous worldviews • Story base teaching • Cultural diversity • Learning together • Cultural integration • Empowerment of children, families and community • Project based teaching • Learning in the world • Braiding Traditional knowledge with technology • Holistic approach to education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting with Aboriginal cultures • Aboriginal pride • Appreciating diversity • Engaged children • Children academically improving • Aboriginal community involvement • Need for more staff & teachers with Aboriginal heritage & activities • More Aboriginal content wanted • School meets students at level they're at • Need new relationships built on mutual understanding & respect between VSB and Aboriginal community • Lively and flexible after-school and support programs • Funding needed for Aboriginal content & engagement with Aboriginal community • Perception of lack of support by district • Low community awareness of Xpey' • Need to reach out to non-Aboriginal parents • Potential to reconnect to culture • Xpey' reminiscent of residential schools (segregated) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there still a will to support Xpey'? • How well we are doing on the things we set out to do? • How can program growth be supported? • What attracts people to the school? • What are staff strengths and what capacities are still desired or needed? • How does the school foster a sense of belonging and community? • What additional structures and supports are needed? • Are there barriers to program success? If so, how can they be removed or reduced?



Appendix 3: Online Survey



Good Relations Research & Consulting

Copy of A Survey Opportunity to Help Review the Xpey' Indigenous Focus Elementary School

Xpey' School Review

The goal of this survey is to provide another way for people to share their perspectives on the Xpey' Indigenous Focus Elementary School, located in Vancouver, BC. Xpey' means cedar in the Hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓ language, and reflects the cultural importance of cedar trees, and the grove that used to live on the site; the first school name was "Cedar Cove". It is currently the only Indigenous Focus School in the Vancouver District, and was started in 2011. The school is open to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in K-7. The vision of Xpey' Elementary is to "strive for educational excellence and an environment where students are confident, respectful, critical thinkers and engaged learners".

This review was initiated by the Vancouver School Board, is being facilitated by Good Relations Research & Consulting, and invites the perspectives of parents, guardians, family members, staff, and community members who are, or have been, connected to the school. The information from the surveys is anonymous and will be combined and used to report on progress, make recommendations, and inform Vancouver School Board decision-making. This survey closes February 15, 2019. Clicking the *Submit Survey* button indicates your consent to add your perspective to the others collected, for use in Xpey' Review activities.

Survey Monkey has locations in San Mateo, Portland, Seattle, Dublin, Ottawa, London and Sydney. Clicking the *Submit Survey* button also indicates your understanding that the information in this survey will be stored in and could be accessed from a location outside of Canada, and that you give consent to the information described below being stored in and accessed from a location outside of Canada. However, no names, phone numbers, emails, addresses or IP addresses are being collected.

If you'd like more information or would like to be involved with the Xpey' Review, please email goodrelationsbusiness@gmail.com. Thank you very much for your assistance with this project!

1. To get an understanding of the diversity of survey participants, please share the cultural group(s) you identify with the most.

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous (Canada) | <input type="checkbox"/> Euro-Canadian | <input type="checkbox"/> African-Canadian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous (Elsewhere) | <input type="checkbox"/> Russian-Canadian | <input type="checkbox"/> Canadian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> British-Canadian | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian-Canadian | <input type="checkbox"/> American (U.S.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French-Canadian | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern-Canadian | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Cultural Group |



2. Which towns, First Nations (FN) or cities do you live, work and play in the most?

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Musqueam FN | <input type="checkbox"/> Vancouver | <input type="checkbox"/> Surrey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tsleil-Waututh FN | <input type="checkbox"/> North Vancouver | <input type="checkbox"/> Langley |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Squamish FN | <input type="checkbox"/> West Vancouver | <input type="checkbox"/> Tsawwassen |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tsawwassen FN | <input type="checkbox"/> Richmond | <input type="checkbox"/> Delta |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Qayqayt FN | <input type="checkbox"/> Burnaby | <input type="checkbox"/> White Rock |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kwkwetlem FN | <input type="checkbox"/> New Westminster | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Town in BC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Katzie FN | <input type="checkbox"/> Port Moody | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Town Outside of BC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Kwantlen FN | <input type="checkbox"/> Coquitlam | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Indigenous Community in BC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Semiahmoo FN | <input type="checkbox"/> Port Coquitlam | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous Community Outside of BC |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Matsqui FN | <input type="checkbox"/> Maple Ridge | <input type="checkbox"/> I Move Around |

3. Which roles do you play most in the lives of Xpey' School children? Choose all that apply.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent/Guardian | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student | <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Administrator | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foster Parent | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological or Counseling Support | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Professional |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous Elder | <input type="checkbox"/> Support Staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous Education Worker | |

Other (please specify)

4. How well is the Xpey' Elementary School doing, in general?

Not Yet Meeting Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Fully Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
★	★	★	★	★

5. In your opinion, what works well in the Xpey' Elementary School? Is there a story you could share?



6. In your opinion, what isn't working well, or needs improvement at the Xpey' Elementary School? Is there a story you could share?

7. What recommendations would you like to make? How can the Xpey' Elementary School be improved? What is your vision for its future?

8. In your opinion, how well has Xpey' fostered confidence, respect, critical thinking and engagement among learners?

Not Yet Meeting Expectations	Approaching Expectations	Meeting Expectations	Fully Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
★	★	★	★	★

9. The following list includes topics considered important for the operation of the Xpey' Elementary School (original vision, past review, current questions). Please check the top 10 topics that are the most important to you. Please add anything that's missing.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extended family approach | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning together | <input type="checkbox"/> Children engaged in meaningful academic learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enhancement workers as a resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural integration | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous community involvement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physicality must be emphasized | <input type="checkbox"/> Empowerment of children, families and community | <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting students at level they're at |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fine arts | <input type="checkbox"/> Project based teaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships built on mutual understanding & respect between VSB and indigenous community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elders | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning in the world | <input type="checkbox"/> Lively and flexible after-school and support programs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The environment (relationship to land and regions of place) | <input type="checkbox"/> Braiding Traditional knowledge with technology | <input type="checkbox"/> Support by district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> History | <input type="checkbox"/> Holistic approach to education | <input type="checkbox"/> Community awareness of Xpey' |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous world views | <input type="checkbox"/> Re/Connecting with Indigenous cultures | <input type="checkbox"/> Reaching out to non-indigenous parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Story based teaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous pride | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciating cultural diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Engaged children | |

Other (please specify)



10. In the last review, areas of concern were identified and recommendations were made to improve the Xpey' Elementary School. In your opinion, which areas still need work? Choose all that apply.

- There's a need for more staff & teachers with Indigenous heritage & activities
- Funding is needed for Indigenous content & engagement with Indigenous communities
- There's a need to reach out to non-Indigenous parents
- More Indigenous content is wanted
- There is a perception of lack of support by the district
- Xpey' reminds people of residential schools
- There's a need for new relationships between VSB and Indigenous communities, built on mutual understanding & respect
- There's low community awareness of Xpey'

Other (please specify)

11. How developed is the sense of belonging or community at the Xpey' Elementary School?

There is no sense of belonging or community at Xpey'	There is little sense of belonging or community at Xpey'	There is a medium sense of belonging or community at Xpey'	There is a good sense of belonging or community at Xpey'	There is a strong sense of belonging or community at Xpey'
				

12. How does the school foster a sense of belonging and community? How can this be improved?

13. What are staff strengths? What kind of training, resources, or other supports are needed?

14. How can school programs grow and succeed? What changes or supports are needed?

15. In your opinion, what attracts people to Xpey' School? What might prevent people from enrolling their children at Xpey'?

16. In your opinion, what worked well, what didn't, and how can things be improved in the review process?



Appendix 4: Word Frequency Table

Key Word(s)	Total Word Count
<i>Interest in Academic Excellence</i>	
Academic	12
Critical	5
Education	142
Empower+Strong+Determin+Mastery	71
Kids+Children+Students	1094
Science+STEM+STEAM	125
Teach	219
Thinking	1010
Learning	246
Total	2924
<i>More Before & Afterschool Programs</i>	
After	82
Programs	137
Before	92
Head+Start	178
Total	489
<i>Increase Indigenous "Look & Feel" & Address Building Concerns</i>	
Air	2
Asbestos	1
Lead+contaminate+paint+water	43
Residential	49
Seismic+earthquake	12
Floor+Wall+Window	26
Clean	11
Bathroom+Washroom+Gender+Male+Boy+Female+Girl	44
Desks	20
Total	208
<i>More Cultural Teachings</i>	
Art	522
Dance	14
Cultural	106
Drum	24
Medicine	15
Knowledge	68
Language	251
Indigenous+Aboriginal+Metis	686
Prayer	11
Protocol	15
Singing	19
Smudge	8
Spiritual+ceremony	83
Elder	145
Total	1967
<i>Less Authoritarian & More Indigenous Approaches</i>	



Vision	35
Authoritarian	2
Care	45
Class	137
Community+Belonging	225
Determin	13
Love	58
Family	165
Open	94
Parents	307
Racism	4
Rules	43
Time+Attendance+Late	389
Kind	309
Total	1826
<i>Improve Relationships with VSB Decision Makers</i>	
Board+Trustee	116
Department	21
District	119
PAC	112
Plan	67
Principal	113
Total	548
<i>Improve Responses to Bullying</i>	
Bullying+Fighting	25
Total	25
<i>Get an Xpex' Bus</i>	
Bus+transportation	48
Total	48
<i>Acknowledge Staff Strengths & Address Staff Challenges</i>	
Committed	14
Strength	41
Staff	351
Teacher	434
Tired+Burnout+leaving	86
Division+Conflict	54
Oppressed+Oppression	8
Old+New	180
Turn+Over	109
Voice+heard	173
Healing	23
Safe	39
Total	1512
<i>More Funding or Upgraded Resources, Supplies and Equipment</i>	
Computer	47
Equipment	11
Funding+Dollar+Money	130



Library+books+supplies	46
Resources	135
Total	369
<i>Address Number of Special Needs Students</i>	
Counsel	16
Designation	31
Formula	9
Label	10
Segregation+ghetto	2
Special+Needs	713
Support	273
Undiagnosed	3
Stigma	4
Total	1061
<i>Land-Base Learning, Sports & Playground Upgrading</i>	
Grass	5
Land+Out+Natur	441
Overnight+Trips+Camping	53
Plant+Garden	19
Playground	15
Sport+ball+soccer	14
Swings	4
Trees	28
Total	579
<i>Continue Food Programs with Some Changes</i>	
Food	40
Breakfast	9
Lunch	25
Snacks	2
Total	76



Appendix 5: Seismic Upgrade List

105 Future Priorities			
32	39	Vancouver	Dr. A R Lord Elementary
34	39	Vancouver	Emily Carr Elementary
35	39	Vancouver	False Creek Elementary
36	39	Vancouver	Florence Nightingale Elementary
37	39	Vancouver	G T Cunningham Elementary
38	39	Vancouver	General Brock Elementary
39	39	Vancouver	Gladstone Secondary
40	39	Vancouver	Graham Bruce Community Elem.
41	39	Vancouver	Grandview Elementary
42	39	Vancouver	John Henderson Elementary
43	39	Vancouver	John Oliver Secondary
44	39	Vancouver	Killarney Secondary
45	39	Vancouver	King George Secondary
46	39	Vancouver	Lord Beaconsfield Elementary
47	39	Vancouver	Lord Selkirk Annex
48	39	Vancouver	Mount Pleasant Elementary
49	39	Vancouver	Nootka Community Elementary
50	39	Vancouver	Prince Of Wales Secondary
51	39	Vancouver	Queen Alexandra Elementary
52	39	Vancouver	Queen Elizabeth Annex
53	39	Vancouver	Queen Elizabeth Elementary
54	39	Vancouver	Queen Victoria Annex
55	39	Vancouver	Quilchena Elementary
56	39	Vancouver	Renfrew Community Elementary
57	39	Vancouver	Sir Alexander Mackenzie Elementary
58	39	Vancouver	Sir John Franklin Community
59	39	Vancouver	Sir Richard McBride Annex
60	39	Vancouver	Sir Wilfred Grenfell Elementary
61	39	Vancouver	Sir William MacDonald Elementary
62	39	Vancouver	Sir William Osler Elementary
63	39	Vancouver	Sir Winston Churchill Secondary
64	39	Vancouver	Southlands Elementary
65	39	Vancouver	Templeton Secondary
66	39	Vancouver	Thunderbird Elementary
67	39	Vancouver	Tillicum Elementary Annex
68	39	Vancouver	Waverley Annex
69	39	Vancouver	Waverley Elementary
70	39	Vancouver	Windermere Community Sec.
71	40	New Westminster	Hume Park Elementary
72	41	Burnaby	Cascade Heights Elementary
73	41	Burnaby	Glenwood Elementary
74	41	Burnaby	Kitchener Elementary
75	41	Burnaby	Marlborough Elementary
76	41	Burnaby	Maywood Community
77	41	Burnaby	Moscrop Jr. Secondary
78	41	Burnaby	Rosser Elementary
79	41	Burnaby	Stoney Creek Elementary
80	42	Maple Ridge - Pitt Meadows	Pitt Meadows Secondary



Appendix 6: Water Report



VANCOUVER SCHOOL BOARD
ATTN: Facilities
Maintenance and Construction
1549 Clark Drive
Vancouver BC V5L 3L4

Date Received: 11-MAY-16
Report Date: 18-MAY-16 18:33 (MT)
Version: FINAL

Client Phone: --

Certificate of Analysis

Lab Work Order #: L1767436
Project P.O. #: NOT SUBMITTED
Job Reference:
C of C Numbers: 14-496967, 14-497614, 14-497615
Legal Site Desc:

Comments: Report separated by school.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Watt', written over a horizontal line.

Dean Watt, B.Sc.
Account Manager

[This report shall not be reproduced except in full without the written authority of the Laboratory.]

ADDRESS: 8081 Lougheed Hwy, Suite 100, Burnaby, BC V5A 1W9 Canada | Phone: +1 604 253 4188 | Fax: +1 604 253 6700
ALS CANADA LTD. Part of the ALS Group A Cambell Brothers Limited Company

Environmental 

www.alsglobal.com

RIGHT SOLUTIONS RIGHT PARTNER



Water Report, Continued

ALS ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYTICAL REPORT

PAGE 2 of 3
 18-MAY-16 18:33 (MT)
 Version: FINAL

Sample ID	L1767436-4	L1767436-5			
Description	Water	Water			
Sampled Date	11-MAY-16	11-MAY-16			
Sampled Time					
Client ID	MACDONALD A099C-SNK	MACDONALD A295-DF			
Grouping	Analyte				
WATER					
Total Metals	Lead (Pb)-Total (mg/L)	0.00305	0.000995		



