Preface

Nurturing Capacity

The K-12 Indspire Institute is focused on dramatically increasing high school completion rates among Indigenous students by building strong foundations in their K-12 education. Through various programs, resources and events, the Institute fosters collaboration between educators, communities, and others to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Indspire conducts research to identify and document educational best practices from across Canada and shares these successful practices through the K-12 Indspire Institute. Indspire also champions Indigenous approaches to education, those that honour Indigenous culture, values, and world views. Through the Nurturing Capacity program, Indspire supports communities to improve educational outcomes through the documentation and evaluation of their successful practices. This community-led process is supported by an Indspire-funded Indigenous scholar, who works with programs on the ground to provide training on data collection and evaluation methodology.

Acknowledgements

The researcher wishes to thank Gerry Corr, Director, Information Technology & Beyond Grade 12 Now, Brian O’Leary, Superintendent, both of Seven Oaks School Division for their assistance in organizing site visits, offering research and data, and for Acting Principal Nancy Janelle for all of the support offered during this assessment. The researcher would also like to thank all of the students, teachers, and administrative staff of the Seven Oaks Met School for their patience and time during interviews and tours.

Project Title
Seven Oaks Met School

Project Holder
Seven Oaks School Division
830 Powers Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2V 4E7
phone: (204) 586-8061
http://www.7oaks.org

Project Lead
Nancy Janelle, Acting Principal
Seven Oaks Met School
711 Jefferson Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2V 0P7
phone: (204) 336-5050
http://www.7oaks.org/school/themet
# Table of Contents

Preface .......................................................................................................................... 2  
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ 2  
Project Title .................................................................................................................. 2  
Project Holder ................................................................................................................ 2  
Project Lead ................................................................................................................... 2  

Executive Summary ....................................................................................................... 4  

Project Title: .................................................................................................................. 5  

Project Context .............................................................................................................. 5  
Project Background ....................................................................................................... 5  
Seven Oaks School Division .......................................................................................... 5  
Indigenous Education in Seven Oaks School Division .................................................. 5  
Brief History of the Seven Oaks Met School ................................................................ 6  
Big Picture Learning ...................................................................................................... 6  
General Description of the Seven Oaks Met School ...................................................... 9  
Indigenous Students and Programming at the Seven Oaks Met School ....................... 9  
Breakdown of Student Learning at the Seven Oaks Met School ................................... 10  
Classroom Learning ..................................................................................................... 11  
Learning Through Internships (LTIs) .......................................................................... 11  
Exhibitions .................................................................................................................... 12  
Parent/Advisor/Student Relationships ......................................................................... 12  
Connecting Indspire Principles and the Seven Oaks Met School ................................. 12  

Project Model .................................................................................................................. 13  

Logic Model .................................................................................................................... 14  

Data Collection .............................................................................................................. 14  
Research Methodology ................................................................................................. 14  
Qualitative Interviews .................................................................................................. 14  

Evaluation of the Seven Oaks Met School .................................................................... 14  
The Interviews ............................................................................................................... 14  
Graduation Rates .......................................................................................................... 17  
Ongoing Challenges of the Seven Oaks Met School ....................................................... 17  

Outcomes: Significant Accomplishments and Lessons Learned ................................ 18  
Significant Accomplishments: Graduation Rates .......................................................... 18  
Lessons Learned: Best Practices at the Seven Oaks Met School .................................. 18  

Next Steps: Visioning the Future of the Seven Oaks Met School ................................. 19  

Appendix: Logic Model for the Seven Oaks Co-operative Vocational Education Program 20
**Executive Summary**

In September 2009 the Seven Oaks School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba opened the first-ever Canadian MET school, housed in the walls of Garden City Collegiate. Based on an innovative education organization called Big Picture Learning (founded in Rhode Island, New York in 1995), the Seven Oaks Met School incorporated notions of contemporary, mainstream schooling with multigrade flex programs, off-campus classrooms, work placements and internships to offer an alternative to basic high school.

A part of their Indigenous Education initiatives, the Seven Oaks Met School aims to change the way the public, policy makers, and educators think of and see public education. Focus is on the principle that students must be responsible for their own education. Alongside attending core courses at nearby Garden City Collegiate, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students take a four-year journey in their high school experience with a cohort and a teacher “advisor” who help guide their curriculum. Internship experiences in the community are guided by a volunteer tutor and mentor. Students are assessed, in part, as other students are(in-classroom) but also in workplaces and during “showcases,” (presentations for school administrators, parents, mentors, and advisors).

The success of the Seven Oaks Met School has been exemplary but there are ongoing challenges it faces to achieve its full potential. The future is extremely promising. A strong foundation requiring further vision, practice, and engagement with the Indigenous community is critical to the future of the school – but the beginning steps are present. The Seven Oaks Met School is an exceptional example of Indigenous student success and the Seven Oaks School Division is encouraged to continue to support this program to the fullest of its ability.
Project Title:

Seven Oaks Met School

Project Context

Project Background

The Seven Oaks Met School is an integral part of the model and plan for Indigenous Education within Seven Oaks School Division.

Seven Oaks School Division

The Seven Oaks School Division is located in Treaty One territory, on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Dakota, and Oji-Cree peoples and the homeland of the Metis Nation. The Division’s mission statement is “The Seven Oaks School Division is a community of learners, everyone of whom shares responsibility to assist children in acquiring an education which will enable them to lead fulfilling lives within the world as moral people and contributing members of society.” It is a school division in the north west of Winnipeg, Manitoba established to service the neighborhoods of West Kildonan, Garden City, Maples, Riverbend, Amber Trails, West St. Paul, and St. Andrews. It currently has 24 schools (with plans to open two more in the next five years), 11,000 students (with an estimated growth to 11,550 by 2016), and 1,311 staff positions.

Indigenous Education in Seven Oaks School Division

Seven Oaks School Division follows a division-wide Indigenous Education Policy that serves to engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents, families, schools, and staff in initiatives that build community and follow a number of provincial and nation-wide policy and position papers. Seven Oaks School Division believes that communities are more sustainable and mutually beneficial when built upon relationships and responsibility to one another to ensure all students benefit. It recognizes that everyone benefits from Indigenous education as it can enrich the experiences of all learners. The division also recognizes that Indigenous peoples have been largely unacknowledged in past incarnations of the education system and this has led to stereotypes, systemic discrimination, and poor policy for all. As a result some Indigenous learners experience high levels of student disengagement and absenteeism, incidences of mental health and behavioural issues, lower then standard levels of literacy and numeracy, challenging levels of parental
engagement, and low aspirations for academic success. According to Seven Oaks Division Superintendent Brian O’Leary, the division-wide Indigenous student population annually is between 10-15% (1100-1650) declared (status and non-status).

Seven Oaks School division therefore engages this history through several ongoing initiatives and programs including:

- A “Circle Garden” teaching space illustrating the 13 moons of the year and traditional teachings (above)
- An Indigenous “scholar-in-residence” to assist in curriculum/program consultation and division planning
- Mandated Indigenous education curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12
- Professional development for teachers
- Indigenous education school representatives
- Treaty Education training
- Elders-in-residence
- Pow-Wow Clubs across the division
- A yearly division-wide Graduation Pow-Wow
- A “school of the month” program highlighting an Indigenous education program
- Indigenous language programs for students, staff and parents of the division
- Seven Oaks Co-operative Vocational Education Program
- The Seven Oaks Met School

The Seven Oaks Division incorporates authentic learning for and with Indigenous peoples in the interests of forging a rich collective identity that honours Indigenous peoples and “all our relations.”

**Brief History of the Seven Oaks Met School**

In September 2009 the Seven Oaks School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba opened the first-ever Canadian MET school, housed in the walls of Garden City Collegiate. Based on an innovative education organization called Big Picture Learning (founded in Rhode Island, New York in 1995), the Seven Oaks Met School incorporated notions of contemporary, mainstream schooling with multigrade flex programs, off-campus classrooms, work placements and internships to offer an alternative to basic high school. Originally capped at 3 classes of 15 students (45 students in total), the Seven Oaks Met School graduated its first class in 2013. The school expanded to 4 classes in 2013 (60 students), 5 classes in 2014 (75 students), and 6 classes in 2015 (90 students). In June 2015 the Seven Oaks Met School opened its doors to a new space across the street from Garden City Collegiate where it will house 8 classes (120 students) for the Fall 2015 school year.

**Big Picture Learning**

In 1995, Big Picture Learning was founded by two educators, Dennis Littky and Elliot Washor. The organization’s purpose was to work with educators, philanthropists and public officials to help adapt a specific notion of school programming to fit the needs of specific schools, school divisions, and educational authorities. Expanding quickly, Big Picture Learning models are currently in more than 55 schools across 14 states in the USA and a small segment of schools in Australia, the Netherlands, Israel and Canada.
Big Picture Learning is a non-profit organization whose mission is “the education of a nation, one student at a time.” They encourage personalized student learning via a multifaceted programming incorporating the classroom, school, and community in the educational experience. This programming follows three key ideas: 1. that learning must be based on each student’s interests and needs; 2. curriculum must be relevant to the student and allow them to do real work in the real world; and 3. students’ growth and abilities must be measured by the quality of their work and how it changes them. The Big Picture Learning takes the focus away from standardized testing and involves community and real world applications, so students are engaged with their world. Assessments are within the realms of practical applications to real life situations, such as performance, exhibition or demonstration of achievement, motivation and personal habits such as mindfulness, organization, and other beneficial behaviours. This gives students the opportunity to see the impact their work has, and begin to affect real change within the communities that they live and work in. In other words, students are tested against real life standards.

Using the “One Student at a Time” idea, each student is educated via the five learning goals:

1. Empirical Reasoning
2. Quantitative Reasoning
3. Communication
4. Social Reasoning
5. Personal qualities.

Each of these qualities is based in real world application, and students develop the necessary skills to question the world around them and receive meaningful answers. They are given the tools they require in order to research, test, interpret, communicate and develop meaningful dialogue in regards to social change and ethical framework. Students are encouraged to use the variety of technology that is available, to promote the use of creativity to express themselves and their ideas, and to see the implications of their dialogue. Consulting on their own curriculum with their teachers, students are taught to be self-starters, and to think like scientists, mathematicians, historians and anthropologists in order to learn how to be effective communicators and develop their own personal qualities. While the model is synergistic in its goals, the student is able to develop respect, responsibility, organization, leadership, time management and personal reflection.

The driving force behind the Big Picture philosophy is “relationships, relevance, and rigor.” Relevance, translated into student interests, is what frames the Met School Learning Model. While the entire process is framed by the five Met School Learning Goals, it is the individual student interests that determine the individualized Learning Plans. This includes their internship placements (Learning Through Internship – LTI) and School-Based Projects (SBP). In addition, students attend workshops, field trips, and guest speaker sessions. It is through the LTIs and SBPs that the student will gain the specific curricular outcomes needed to obtain the high school credits required for graduation. Empirical reasoning, quantative reasoning, communication, social reasoning relate directly to the Science, Math, and English Language Arts and Social Studies curricula respectively. The fifth learning goal, personal qualities, permeates all learning experiences. The Learning Plan culminates with an exhibition. Three or four times a year students will demonstrate their learning for that quarter.

During the first years of its creation, the MET school in Rhode Island was able to boast a 96% graduation rate for their students, with 98% being accepted to Post-Secondary educational institutions. Because of
those successes and the growing reputation of the MET school, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation gave Big Picture Learning a large grant in order to be able to replicate The Met in other states across the country. In the United States today, Big Picture Learning schools perform higher than the average with a graduation rate of 87% (versus 74.7% in traditional high-schools nationally). Big Picture Learning advocates also engage in a wide variety of contexts in order to influence public policy and effect change at the local and national scale.

**Objectives of the Project**

The Seven Oaks Met School plan has three primary objectives:

1. To strengthen classroom practices that support students’ commitment to quality work and valuable learning experiences while helping them value experiences that Met School offers and take responsibility for learning through:
   a. meeting deadlines
   b. submitting quality work
   c. critically reflecting on their strengths and challenges.

2. To secure Internships that challenge students to develop personal qualities, understandings of community and bring together academic learning with real world applications.

3. To strengthen the Met School program and better inform students, families, and the divisional community about the opportunities Met School holds for high school students, families and community.

The vision of the Seven Oaks Met School is for students to better develop confidence and competence, engage in learning and demonstrate commitment to academic responsibilities and to community.
General Description of the Seven Oaks Met School

The Seven Oaks Met School (seen below) incorporates notions of contemporary, mainstream schooling with multi-grade flex programs, off-campus classrooms, work placements and internships to offer an alternative to basic high school. They attend core courses at nearby Garden City Collegiate. Students take a four-year journey during their high school experience with a cohort and a teacher, developing their curriculum together. They also perform internships in the community under a volunteer tutor and mentor. Previously housed in Garden City Collegiate, the Seven Oaks Met School opened its new facility at 711 Jefferson Avenue in June 2015. It now boasts seven teachers, one administrator, and one staff administrative support member for the 2015 school year. There are 105 students enrolled. For the 2016-2017 school year the school will reach maximum capacity of eight teachers, and 120 students.

Indigenous Students and Programming at the Seven Oaks Met School

According to Seven Oaks Division Superintendent Brian O’Leary, Indigenous student participation in the MET school is on par with the 10-15% (self-declared) found in the overall Seven Oaks School Division. These students include status and non-status First Nation and Métis students. Specific Indigenous students have been recommended and been accepted into the school – and most have achieved great success under its model. According to Seven Oaks Division Superintendent Brian O’Leary, Indigenous graduation rates mirror the Seven Oaks division-wide graduation rate of 90% and is higher than several programs throughout the division.

The Seven Oaks Met School follows the division-wide goals of the Seven Oaks School division and is supported by all of the institutional resources under its Indigenous Education delivery model. The school also participates in cultural and social events held at nearby Garden City Collegiate – such as Pow-Wows and other Indigenous events. In 2014 classes from the school toured Fisher River First Nation and received cultural and educational teachings from elders and knowledge keepers. At various times elders such as Isa Bussidor and Beatrice Culleton-Motionier have come in to share teachings about residential schools, literature and storytelling, and other topics (such as the Star blanket, activism, the environment, and music/dance). According to Acting Principal Nancy Janelle, future plans include visits to Shoal Lake First Nation, further teacher training specialized areas and what she calls “authentic student experiences” from Indigenous knowledge keepers in the community. The MET school is expected to follow the mandated Indigenous education curriculum as required of all schools in the Seven Oaks School division. Individual teachers at the MET school are encouraged to participate – and
many do—in events in the Indigenous community and to obtain legally mandated cultural competency training (if they have not already have received it during their training).

**Breakdown of Student Learning at the Seven Oaks Met School**

The Seven Oaks Met School is open to students from grades 9-12, and applicants apply by filling out an application form. A sample Seven Oaks Met School pamphlet is below. Students are encouraged to be creative with their application, and can use many different methods to answer the single question “The best thing they have written/created.” Parents or other significant adults with the student are also required to provide a statement to outline why the Seven Oaks Met Schools’ style appeals to the child as a learner. Students are also recommended for admission by grade 8 teachers from across the division. Selected participants range from high-achieving academic students who want to take their learning to the next level to those who find themselves struggling in a regular high school setting.

Put into a class of 15 students, students enroll in nearby Garden City Collegiate to take math and science classes (and other specialized courses like band or choir) alongside their MET school curriculum, which focuses on the Humanities (specifically Social Studies and English). The Seven Oaks Met School has seven certified classroom teachers called “advisers” who work with their cohorts to develop an ongoing curriculum that meets both the needs and interests of the students and the goals of Manitoba Education and Training.
It is through a Learning Plan incorporating curriculum delivery, Learning Through Internships (LTIs) and school-based projects (SBPs) that the student will address the specific Manitoba curricular outcomes in order to obtain their required high school credits needed for graduation. The Met School Learning Goals are closely linked to the Manitoba curricula. Empirical reasoning, quantitative reasoning, communication, social reasoning relate directly to the Science, Math, and English Language Arts and Social Studies curricula respectively. The fifth learning goal, personal qualities, permeates all learning experiences. The Learning Plan culminates with an LTI exhibition.

**Classroom Learning**

Classroom delivery is very flexible and operate in a “workshop” format – according to the needs of the topic being taught. Academic rigour is built into each student’s program (see Big Picture Learning Goals) but planned individually for each student by the advisor. The speed at which the student is ready to work is emphasized. Academic accountability is built into the project through an inquiry approach to learning that follows the student’s interests and passions. Days are split into modules often shared by teachers as they travel between classes and share their expertise with each student cohort. Units can either be short or long term, depending on the time, content, and interest of the adviser and students. Focus is on project creation and delivery within the classroom. Every day, however, each class meets with the adviser to establish the plan for the day, the goals, and how this will be evaluated (following chart below). The Seven Oaks Met School schedule also includes times for social events, advocacy activities, organizing, or whatever needs attention. Time is set aside for individual study and research, writing journals, picking up computer technology skills, flexible groupings for studies or projects, or targeting certain skills. The idea is to open up the world to students, show them how the curriculum connects directly to the real world, and help students discover their relationship to its content.

**Learning Through Internships (LTIs)**

On Tuesdays and Thursdays Seven Oaks MET students are out in the community, working with mentors in business, community agencies, and institutions related to the students’ interests. The LTI (Learning Through Internships) immerses students in the adult world where they are exposed to expertise in fields that may spark their interest in a career. During the internship, they must develop skills to help them navigate day-to-day life in that workplace. Advisers help foster these relationships in grade 9 but during later years students must organize and form relationships with businesses and service agencies in order to deliver their LTI. To prepare, students research potential workplaces through workplace tours and also “shadow” potential work partners, finally making a selection. Then students develop a resume and practice interview techniques, then undergo a 40-minute interview before starting an internship. Students not only intern but also plan and carry out a major project that will benefit the host organization. Past LTI workplaces have included private and public agencies. A brief sample list includes:

- Safeway Canada
- Winnipeg Humane Society
- Basketball Manitoba
- Manitoba Museum
- Red River College
- Rainbow Stage
- Artists Emporium

The relationship between the Seven Oaks Met School and surrounding LTI partners is crucial to the operating of the school so advisers are regularly checking in to see if the student is participating and meeting both his/her goals and the goals of the partner. Advisers often incorporate individual student LTI projects into classroom work. In addition to being invited to witness exhibitions, every year the Seven Oaks Met School rewards mentors with an annual celebration including gifts and reports of student progress.

**Exhibitions**

At least three times a year students must put on exhibitions to explain and demonstrate what they have learned both in the classroom and in their LTI. Students foster and work on a variety of skills for their presentation in front of their advisory group, adviser, their mentor and their parents. These are showcases for the student to demonstrate their classroom and community learning. They are intended to be periodic culminations of a student’s participation in the Seven Oaks Met School. The exhibition represents a kind of self-appraisal, and the mentors and advisors assess students’ growth and progress as well as academic growth. Students must keep weekly journals, with weekly check-ins with advisors, and complete yearly presentation portfolios. Major checkpoints, called Gateways, occur between grades 10 and 11 and at graduation, to ensure students have completed all necessary work. This includes meeting required provincial testing and achieving the goals laid out in individual learning plans. Advisors complete both qualitative and quantitative assessments for reporting to parents. Seven Oaks MET students receive grades for some of their work, in line with provincial requirements. Big Picture assessments are translated into transcripts acceptable to colleges and universities.

**Parent/Advisor/Student Relationships**

According to this research, one of the most important relationships for a student’s success in the Seven Oaks Met School is between the advisor and the parents/guardians of a student. There is ongoing communication between an advisor and a parent/guardian to ensure that the goals of the school are meeting the needs and expectations of the family. Parents/Guardians are asked to participate in student learning in LTIs, exhibitions, advisor meetings, and in school administration (or in some cases, classroom delivery). In some individual cases, when a parent/guardian is absent for instance, an alternative supervisory support system is instituted. The focus remains on the successful support of the student.

**Connecting Indspire Principles and the Seven Oaks Met School**

The Seven Oaks Met School embodies four of the seven Indspire foundational guiding principles for Indigenous educational practice.
Through a central focus on student directed learning and evaluation (Best Practice #1) the Seven Oaks Met School incorporates a foundational belief that cultural/language communities have the right to define success for their own well-being (Principle #4).

Illustrating an ongoing message that learning as a life-long process and a “long-term” seven-generation journey (Best Practice #4), the Seven Oaks Met School promotes the idea that learning is viewed as lifelong, holistic, and experiential, which is rooted in language and culture, is place-based, spiritually oriented, communal and open to multiple ways of knowing the world (Principle #5).

A commitment to community engagement, building, and incorporation (Best Practice #3) shows how the Seven Oaks Met School is a program responsive to both the aspirations and needs of Indigenous peoples (Principle #6).

The fabric of the Seven Oaks Met School is relationship building in the classroom, in workplaces, in political and non-governmental organizations, and in the community (Best Practice #2) and therefore embodies an anti-racist, anti-oppressive pedagogy and process of decolonization (Principle #7).

Project Model

Figure 1: Project Model: The Big Picture Learning Design
Logic Model

The logic model (please see Appendix) was prepared via a qualitative study using participatory research methods combining analytics, site visits, interviews, stakeholder meetings, secondary sources to ascertain a triangulation conclusion of the role of the Seven Oaks Met School in relation to the Winnipeg Aboriginal community.

Data Collection

Research Methodology

This report is a qualitative study using participatory research methods combining analytics, site visits, interviews, stakeholder meetings, secondary sources to ascertain a triangulation conclusion of the role of the Seven Oaks Met School in relation to the Winnipeg Indigenous community. One researcher with extensive education, experience, and knowledge of research methods and delivery was contracted to perform a short-term analysis highlighting best practices, recommendations, and information regarding program delivery. This researcher conferenced with school representatives, students, and teachers, supervised daily activity in the school, and consulted with school administration to study statistical data.

Qualitative Interviews

Administrators, teachers, and Indigenous students interviewed by the researcher reported a great deal of satisfaction for their choice in attending the Seven Oaks Met School. Nine interviews including one administrator, two teachers, and six students were held. Via recorded interviews, the following questions were asked and solicited the following answers.

Evaluation of the Seven Oaks Met School

The Interviews

Participants in interviews were asked the following five standard questions as starting points for discussions.

1. What is it about the MET school that makes it unique or different to other schooling you’ve experienced?
   - (administrator) We do high school differently as we put relationships at the centre. Studies show that when teachers and employers take time to build ties with students and parents – when everyone is involved in learning at the same time - students perform better. We have not only an expectation of students engaging community but it’s built into the very curriculum and way we assess learning. The response from the community has also been fantastic. I actually thought it would be tough to find job placements for students but it’s actually rare for a mentor to say no to our program now. We had our pancake breakfast a
few days ago (to thank our mentors) and we had a full room. Everyone we asked to come came.

- (teacher) The showcases of student learning. It is truly an exceptional way to assess, celebrate learning, and build skills – all at the same time. Students can invite anyone to their showcases (teachers, employers, younger students). It is an opportunity for students to highlight their learning but also a chance to show the long-term plans a student has for their learning. These are narratives of life-long learning practices with students being accountable not only to their community but to themselves.

- (student) I haven’t been in a class where we study English and Social Studies as the same time we do Dungeons and Dragons – all of this teaches creativity and problem solving. I never thought of schoolwork in this way. I also love my placements. I learned a lot working in a team and doing things like painting motorcycles and doing something on my own. I loved being outside of the school and doing things I wanted to do.

- (student) I just finished my first year of the MET school and I have an idea of what I want to be now. I didn’t have that when I was in school before. I would like to open up my own business one day.

2. What are most successful achievements you’ve witnessed while participating in the MET School program?

- (administrator) Because its student led, students are more engaged as their learning is relevant. This creates a sense of rigour, involvement, and excitement in education that I haven’t seen many other educational institutions.

- (teacher) From where I sit, the top experience for every student is the mentorship experience. I’ve seen the most growth due to a student’s relationship and learning experience with professionals. In my class there have been a lot of successes in students being accountable, practically applying what they’re learning in school, and achieving success through self-starting, active, engaged behavior.

- (student) I can see myself in 20 years doing work that I am doing now. I’m going to workplaces that I might be at in the future. This place gave me a headstart in doing things I want to do.

- (student) The MET school gave me experience in the real world.

3. What’s the largest benefit for Indigenous students attending the MET School?

- (administrator) We not only have a beautiful new space to welcome students but we assess in ways that welcome demonstrations of learning that often are ignored elsewhere. We value relationships with teachers, employers, and also parents, elders, and community leaders. This is best displayed in our showcases, where students not only demonstrate traditional academic skills but things like storytelling, public speaking skills, ability to engage questions, and other skills needed for a successful future.

- (teacher) If you’re a student who struggles with institutional approaches to education this school provides relationships, flexibility, and consistency that mainstream schooling doesn’t provide. It’s a part of my job description to build a relationship with students over years and many different experiences. It takes a long time for any student to trust anyone but the MET school provides opportunities to tailor classes and internships in culturally-specific ways – incorporating parents, employers, and teachers – that foster life-long relationships and a foundation for the future.

- (student) My cousins don’t come to the MET School and I’ve noticed that they don’t like school much. I like school. I like going to the pow-wow and stuff but it’s mostly I feel like a
family here. My sister likes it here too but she really loves her internship. She wanted to work with animals and now she is at the Humane Society and wants to always work there now. She also wants to do art too and could probably do that if she wants to too. Now my brother are gonna come here and that’s cool.

- (student) None of my cousins finished school. I just finished grade nine. I want to be like the teachers and people I work with. I plan on graduating.

4. How does the MET School incorporate Indigenous methods, communities, and curriculum in student experiences?
   - (administrator) We ensure that all teachers have culturally-specific training and deliver mandated units from the division. We also do a lot of cross-teaching, where teachers share expertise in specific areas outside of their classroom. As an administrator, I ensure that Indigenous education is a part of our school plan – things like guest speakers, visits to Indigenous communities, and new resources for our students.
   - (teacher) Of course I teach the directed curriculum and participate in events like the division pow-wow but I’ve really noticed something interesting. Since students research and choose their own internships I have noticed that more and more students (and not just Indigenous students) are choosing to work in Indigenous communities in Winnipeg – in service organizations and private businesses.
   - (student) My mom loves that I go to the MET School. She told me that I only had to come for one year and try it and here I am in year two. If I didn’t come here I would probably have dropped out. I love my teacher cause she cares.
   - (student) I loved learning how to make my own moccasins in my internship (at an Indigenous craft shop). Working with the beadworker they brought in was hard but it made me really happy. I still wear those moccasins.

5. What are the biggest challenges you’ve witnessed while participating in the MET School program? Please provide examples.
   - (administrator) I can’t think of anything more that the school division would need to do to help us but perhaps I can see issues with our work being combined with the provincial curriculum. It’s sometimes like putting a round peg in a square hole when trying to cover the provincial mandated curriculum and what we do here at MET school. I would like to see more collaboration between our provincial education bodies and the delivery of things like standardized tests and the creation of well-rounded, employable, and relationship-driven students. We of course spend a lot of time preparing students for tests but we don’t consider that our primary assessment model – our internship showcases do that much better.
   - (teacher) Burnout. I can see myself doing this job in three cycles (12 years with three groups of students). Although you don’t have the number of students as a regular teacher you have to wear several hats – counsellor, mentor, job visitor, teacher, and more. It is a completely different relationship to any teaching job I’ve ever had. I’m in constant contact with students as they work at their job sites and come to class. I have to also come up with a constantly rotating and mobile curriculum based on my student’s interests. Don’t get me wrong, I love it. My wife tells me she can see I love it. But it’s exhausting.
   - (student) It’s hard to balance travelling to work places with coming to school every day.
   - (student) Pre-calculus is hard and I didn’t like that I had to do it.
(student) I had a real hard time adjusting to the time management schedule you have to put yourself on. The MET school expects me to do my own work, make my own deadlines, and hand in stuff when I think it’s ready. That’s hard.

Graduation Rates

According to Seven Oaks Division Superintendent Brian O’Leary, division wide, approximately 90% of Seven Oaks School Division graduate while two of every three Seven Oaks graduates continue their education after graduation. According to Seven Oaks Division Superintendent Brian O’Leary, the Seven Oaks Met School is within this success rate for Indigenous learners, with 80% graduating and 60% continuing on with post-secondary or college education. The success of Indigenous learners is on average much higher than other, mainstream programs in the school division where 70% of Indigenous students graduate and 50% continue on to post-secondary or college institutions. The Seven Oaks Met School should be applauded for their impressive and exciting work.

Ongoing Challenges of the Seven Oaks Met School

While successful, the Seven Oaks Met School continues develop the delivery of its work. Only six years old, it still has a way to go and should work on the following aspects:

- Training teachers adequately. Teachers – even experienced ones in other schools – report a steep learning curve when beginning their jobs at the Seven Oaks Met School.
- Achieving and sustaining a viable and ongoing – even somewhat institutional – enrolment process incorporating Indigenous students. The school reports a struggle yearly in finding Indigenous candidates for the school.
- Engaging Indigenous parents/guardians, leaders, educators, and cultural advisors who can support the program.
- Strengthening the design implementation to establish the desired culture and practice of Indigenous learners under the Seven Oaks Met School Indigenous Vision Action Plan (and providing teachers input and training under this plan).
- Raising awareness and promoting an informed understanding of the Seven Oaks Met School and Big Picture Learning in the wider community.
- Gathering and disseminating more “hard” data on achievement, attendance and retention that confirms the school’s success (perhaps even showcasing some LTI projects in the community).
- How to quantitatively evaluate of the transformation of students during their time in program (while respecting privacy laws and other personal information)
- Supporting and acknowledging mentors and building long-term partnerships, while at the same time not exhausting present partnerships. Managing the substantial emotional, personal and time commitments of advisory teachers and managing the workload without lessening what is offered through the school.
Outcomes: Significant Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

Significant Accomplishments: Graduation Rates

Division wide, approximately 90% of Seven Oaks School Division graduate while two of every three Seven Oaks graduates continue their education after graduation. According to Seven Oaks Division Superintendent Brian O’Leary, the Seven Oaks Met School is within this success rate for Indigenous learners, with 80% graduating and 60% continuing on with post-secondary or college education. The success of Indigenous learners is on average much higher than other, mainstream programs in the school division where 70% of Indigenous students graduate and 50% continue on to post-secondary or college institutions. The Seven Oaks Met School should be applauded for their impressive and exciting work.

Lessons Learned: Best Practices at the Seven Oaks Met School

The Seven Oaks Met School is an innovative alternative to mainstream schooling and has clearly been a successful option for Aboriginal students. According to this research this is because of the following four “best practices”:

1. **Student-Directed Learning**
   The Seven Oaks Met School is the epitome of student-directed education. Students take initiative in developing their curriculum, the speed of their learning, and the makeup of their education experience (particularly their LTI). They showcase their learning in their own designed directed LTI showcase and participate in evaluation. In relation to contemporary schooling, students at the Seven Oaks Met School get a radical experience of taking control of what they are learning, how they learn it, and at what speed – all while trying to fit under existing curricula.

2. **Relationships**
   The fabric of the Seven Oaks Met School is relationship-building but students also learn how to engage, foster, and maintain relationships both in and out of the classroom; in the workplace, in political and non-governmental organizations, and in the community. This process is manifold, extending throughout every aspect of a student’s experience and all the way to graduation, incorporating life-long skills that clearly assist students in their future studies and career planning. With rigor, students create relevant relationships that can only assist their future life and lay a foundation for the future.

3. **Community Involvement**
   Students at the Seven Oaks Met School engage in their local and city community in a multitude of ways, incorporating practical knowledge with curricular experiences. They perform projects that “give back” while also illustrating their personal growth as a future citizen in society. They engage ongoing partnerships that can lead to future careers. Students also experience first hand what kind of work they enjoy, have much to learn about, and who can help them. Of all aspects of the Seven Oaks Met School, this is perhaps the most exciting aspect for Aboriginal learners, who are often culturally trained to respect and honour community in all of their personal and professional life.
4. **Long term “Seven Generation” Education**

The Seven Oaks Met School incorporates all aspects of the Aboriginal Education plan for the Seven Oaks School Division but – most importantly – includes the ability to think beyond both its school walls and the life of a student while in the division, embodying a true “seven generations” and wholistic learning model based on Indigenous principles of universal relationships and life as an educational journey – not a destination. These principles are embodied in models found at the Canadian Council of Learning for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners. The Seven Oaks Met School incorporates a vision of education that does not end in the classroom but begins there.

**Next Steps: Visioning the Future of the Seven Oaks Met School**

The potential next steps of the Seven Oaks Met School are extremely promising -- the opportunity offered by this beginning is exceptional. A shared understanding with the Indigenous community about the vision, practice, and learning taking place through the school is critical to the future of the school. The next steps need to be developed over time. While it may take several years to achieve high levels of improvement on all desired outcomes, improvements have been attained by students and continue to be in their professional and personal lives. These are observable by students and their families, teachers and mentors.

In terms of the next stage of the development of the Seven Oaks Met School, additional resources are required and some detailed planning is needed to ensure that the Seven Oaks Met School reaches its institutional goals. The Seven Oaks School Division is encouraged to continue to support this program to the fullest of its ability. For students, different and unique opportunities come out of being a part of the Met School and this is a tremendous asset to not only this community but Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities throughout Winnipeg.

This researcher encourages this direction for this work has only started. As Seven Oaks Division Superintendent Brian O’Leary said recently: “I am very happy with the way Met School has grown and I would like to see it continue to expand.”
## Appendix: Logic Model for the Seven Oaks Co-operative Vocational Education Program

| Long Term Outcomes | - Full integration of Seven Oaks Indigenous Education policies/practices into the Seven Oaks Co-operative Vocational Education Program  
- Fully integrated relationship with Indigenous community in Winnipeg, including Indigenous businesses, community agencies, and parents in Seven Oaks School Division.  
- Incorporate long-term institutional principles based on Indigenous wholistic learning models and principals of universal relationships.  
- Support sustainable and mutually beneficial learning goals within Indigenous Education policies in Seven Oaks School Division.  
- Further provide Indigenous students with a foundation to find employment of their choice and graduate with an opportunity for success  
- Expand Indigenous student participation in the Seven Oaks Met School |
|---|---|
| Intermediate Outcomes | - Increased involvement of Indigenous businesses and educators as mentors  
- Increased involvement of Indigenous organizations and businesses and educators as partners  
- Increase graduation rates of Indigenous students  
- Help students experience real-life applicability with their theoretical training and combine employable skills constantly and independently  
- To better develop confidence and competence amongst students and engage them in learning and the demonstration of commitments to academic responsibilities and community. |
| Short Term Outcomes | - Increased Indigenous student recruitment and enrolment  
- Focus on recruiting at-risk students with difficulty in mainstream school settings.  
- Assist teachers and provide resources to re-work curriculum according to classroom needs and provincial standards.  
- Train and support teachers adequately.  
- Achieving and sustaining a viable and ongoing – even somewhat institutional – enrolment process incorporating Aboriginal students.  
- Engage Aboriginal parents/guardians, leaders, educators, and cultural advisors who can support the program.  
- Strengthen the design implementation to establish the desired culture and practice of Aboriginal learners.  
- Raise awareness and promoting an informed understanding of the Seven Oaks Met School and Big Picture Learning in the wider community. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outputs and Indicators</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Students take initiative in developing their curriculum, the speed of their learning, and the makeup of their education experience (particularly their LTI).  
- Students showcase learning in their own designed directed LTI showcase and participate in evaluation.  
- Students engage, foster, and maintain relationships both in and out of the classroom; in the workplace, in political and non-governmental organizations, and in the community.  
- Students engage local and city community and incorporate practical knowledge with curricular experiences by performing projects that “give back” to community while also illustrating their personal growth as a future citizen.  
- Assess student/parent/teacher/administrator interest/satisfaction/inputs in program.  
- Students develop each of the five Big Picture Learning Indicators in Empirical Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, Communication, Social Reasoning and Personal qualities. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frames</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - See above:  
  Short term (1-2 years)  
  Intermediate (3-4 years)  
  Long term (5+ years) |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Activities</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Strengthen classroom practices that support students’ commitment to quality work and valuable learning experiences while helping them value experiences that Met School offers and take responsibility for learning through:  
  a. meeting deadlines  
  b. submitting quality work  
  c. critically reflecting on their strengths and challenges.  
- Secure Internships that challenge students to develop student personal qualities, understandings of community and bring together academic learning with real world applications.  
- Strengthen Met School program and better inform our students, families, and divisional community about the opportunities Met School holds for high school students, families and community. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs: Resources</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - students (interest, energy, participation)  
- teachers (curriculum, mentorship, assessment, resources)  
- administrators (institutional resources, networking, oversight)  
- parents (attendance, involvement, expertise, assessment)  
- mentors/business owners (curriculum, assessment, experiences) |