



# **Kainai High School Student Success Program: Evaluating 'The Quarter System'**

**2015**

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## 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 worldviews.

## Abstract

The Quarter System is an educational structure that seeks to improve overall student achievement by increasing the total number of credits attained per year. Research shows that an inability to attain sufficient high school credits has prevented many First Nations and Métis youth from achieving success in secondary schools. Therefore, implementing The Quarter System in schools with high populations of First Nations of Métis students will improve student success. Kainai High School in Southern Alberta is utilizing the Quarter System to improve educational outcomes for its students. This review provides an in-depth analysis of qualitative and quantitative data demonstrating a strong correlation between The Quarter System and the total number of credits First Nations youth have attained in the Kainai community. Issues covered include possible long-term impacts and next steps to ensure further success for this community and its youth.

## Project Holder

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## Executive Summary

In 2010, the Administration of Kainai High School (KHS) in Cardston, Alberta sought to achieve greater student academic success. With approval from the Kainai Board of Education (KBE) and the federal and provincial government, KHS began researching and designing a Student Success Plan. A large part of this plan referred to implementing a Quarter System to replace the current Semester System.

It was hoped this Quarter System would address the issues of:

- High drop out rates;
- Lack of credit attainment (leading to lower graduation rates);
- High incidences of non-compliance;
- Lack of student engagement; and
- High school absenteeism.

Furthermore, the Quarter System is rooted deeply in the educational principle that systems and structures must be changed in order to meet the needs of the learner, rather than attempting to mould the learner into archaic structures that simply cannot meet their needs.

The following evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the Quarter System in addressing the issues mentioned above, as well as the overall view of the system from the perspective of the administration, teaching staff, Elders, parents, as well as current and former students.

This report provides an overview of this project and includes a logic model that demonstrates the project flow and processes. In addition, both qualitative and quantitative data sets prove that the Quarter System has been very successful in achieving its short and intermediate goals and is poised to achieve its long-term goals in the near future. In terms of the perceptions of the system, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the system and all participants included in this study value the aspects of this type of learning structure.

Finally, accomplishments, limitations, and next steps are outlined to assist the evaluator and KHS in moving in a direction that will allow the Quarter System to grow and thrive.

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## Project Title: Kainai High School Quarter System Program

### Guiding Principles & Educational Practices— Indspire Seven Guiding Principles

The KHS Student Success Program, including the implementation of the Quarter System, is based on the following Indspire principles:

- **Principle 5:** 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 6:** Programs, schools and systems are responsive to both the aspirations and needs of Indigenous peoples.
- **Principle 7:** Recognizing the legacy of the colonial histories of Indigenous peoples, education is also a process of decolonization, which seeks to strengthen, enhance and embrace Indigenous Knowledge and experience through various strategies including but not limited to anti-racist, anti-oppressive pedagogies and Indigenous pedagogies.<sup>1</sup>

### Best Practices in Education: The Quarter System

In 2010, Kainai High School (KHS) implemented the Quarter System in an effort to increase student successes (measured by courses completed, credits attained, and ultimately reflected in graduation rates). While most secondary institutions in Canada offer a Semester System for Grades 9 through 12, KHS envisioned a Quarter System wherein the students would move through the same number of content and courses each year, but in a different way. Rather than completing 2 semesters a year and taking 4 courses a semester, the Quarter System reverses this and students take 2 courses per quarter but have 4 quarters in a school year.

It is a fundamental tenant of good educational practice that a school must meet the needs of the population it serves (Elmore, 2004). Kainai High School recognized that there are many ways to change traditional school structures and functions, if those aspects are creating disadvantages in the school community. For First Nations youth, changes to the structure of the school day can play a large part in ensuring student success. The Quarter System allows students who may experience economic disadvantage, family breakdown, exposure to trauma and violence (including intergenerational trauma), a lack of family and social supports, learning disabilities or difficulties, and negative feelings toward formal schooling an opportunity to exercise greater autonomy and control in their school career.

The Quarter System does not allow students to “fail” in the traditional sense, as an inability to pass one course in one quarter does not jeopardize an entire semester or year for the student. The structure of the system also allows for longer classes, project-based learning, daily one-on-one time with teachers, and a Monday to Thursday school week leaving Fridays available to catch up on work or recover credits from previous quarters. Kainai High School has recognized that the traditional Semester System cannot meet the needs of its current student population

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<sup>1</sup> The information appears in the *Indspire: Nurturing Capacity Information Guide for Researchers*.

and that as such, the system and the structure needs to evolve rather than demanding the students attempt to fit into a structure that does not have their best interests in mind.

### **Connecting Indspire Principles & The Quarter System**

The Quarter System speaks to the three Indspire guiding principles highlighted above. It recognizes that *“learning is viewed a 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.”* For this reason Blackfoot Culture and Language classes are offered quarterly as an afternoon course and, as of the 2013-2014 school year, all graduates of KHS must have Blackfoot 30 in order to graduate.

In terms of ensuring that *“programs, schools and systems are responsive to both the aspirations and needs of Indigenous peoples,”* the Administration carries out regular program evaluations with staff, students, Elders, parents, and community members to ensure the system is meeting the needs of all concerned members. The feedback is given serious consideration and changes are made to meet the needs of individual students. Regular consultation with the Kainai Board of Education also ensures KHS is adhering to the needs of the Indigenous youth in the community.

KHS also *“recognizes the legacy of the colonial histories of Indigenous peoples, education and that there must be process of decolonization, which seeks to strengthen, enhance and embrace Indigenous Knowledge and experience through various strategies including but not limited to anti-racist, anti-oppressive pedagogies and Indigenous pedagogies.”* It is for this reason that KHS made such significant changes to the structure of the school year and week, as well as daily schedules. They have recognized that the traditional western school system prevents some students from equally accessing and benefiting from secondary education. Anti-oppressive education tells us that further oppression occurs when students are forced into structures that do not allow them to be successful. Through the Quarter System, the credit recovery program and the four-day school week, KHS has created a school structure that is meaningful and accessible for students.

## Context

### Project Background

Kainai High School is located near Cardston, Alberta on the Kainai First Nation. The population is comprised mostly of Blackfoot people and the total population as of 2013 was just over 11,000 people (Kainai-Blood Tribe, 2015).

Kainai High School serves approximately 165 students from Grades 9 to 12 yearly. With funding from the Government of Alberta and the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Branch, the school operates as a *Band Operated School*. In addition, Kainai has its own Board of Education (KBE), which oversees all school operations and administrative decisions. It is unknown how many students identify as First Nations or Métis, however the majority of the people living in the community are of Blackfoot heritage. The Student Success Program including the Quarter System has been in effect since September 2010 with a development focus on secondary students (Grade 10 – 12). There are an average of 200 participants in the Quarter System program per year.

In December 2009, Kainai High School contacted the Alberta Department of Education and the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Department to gain information on what procedures to follow to implement the Quarter System at Kainai High School and they were given the full support of both branches of government to pursue the system. In January of 2010, the Kainai Board of Education requested research (from schools who had successfully implemented this program), and consultation with parents in the community. The school administration consulted with two schools in Alberta currently operating on the Quarter System, then presented at the Kainai Board of Education Community Conference and held a parent meeting.

In September of 2010, Kainai High School implemented the Quarter System to address the following issues with the student body:

- High drop out rates;
- Lack of credit attainment (leading to lower graduation rates);
- High incidences of non-compliance;
- Lack of student engagement; and
- High school absenteeism.

Furthermore, Kainai High School wanted to address the following questions:

- If students are able to salvage half of the semester before dropping out, will they begin to accumulate credits in the three to four years of high school?
- If students had some success before facing too many pressures at once will they have the desire to return and continue to have success?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Information for the Project Context was obtained from the *Kainai High School 4-Year Report (2009-2012)* & a PowerPoint presentation titled “*Kainai High School*” created by Annette Bruised Head, October 2013.



### Objective of the Project

Kainai High School identified several objectives of the project that would eventually guide them in developing a comprehensive and cohesive project plan (as evidenced in the Logic Model). The following objectives were:

- Increase the total number of credits attained per year for each students enrolled (grade 10-12) thus eventually improving retention and graduation rates.
- Increase and ensure daily attendance and engagement of students.
- Engage educators, administrators, and school counsellors to ensure the success of the Quarter System.
- Engage the student body to take responsibility and be accountable.
- Provide proper professional development and program delivery for staff and educators.
- Assist the staff and students to “adjust” to the new system.
- Increase parent, community, and Elder enrolment.
- Make certain that students are adequately prepared for post-secondary education and/or the work force.
- Gather comprehensive quantitative and narrative data from staff, students, parents, and Elders to ensure proper design and delivery of the Quarter System.<sup>3</sup>

### Scope of the Project

Kainai High School’s mandate is:

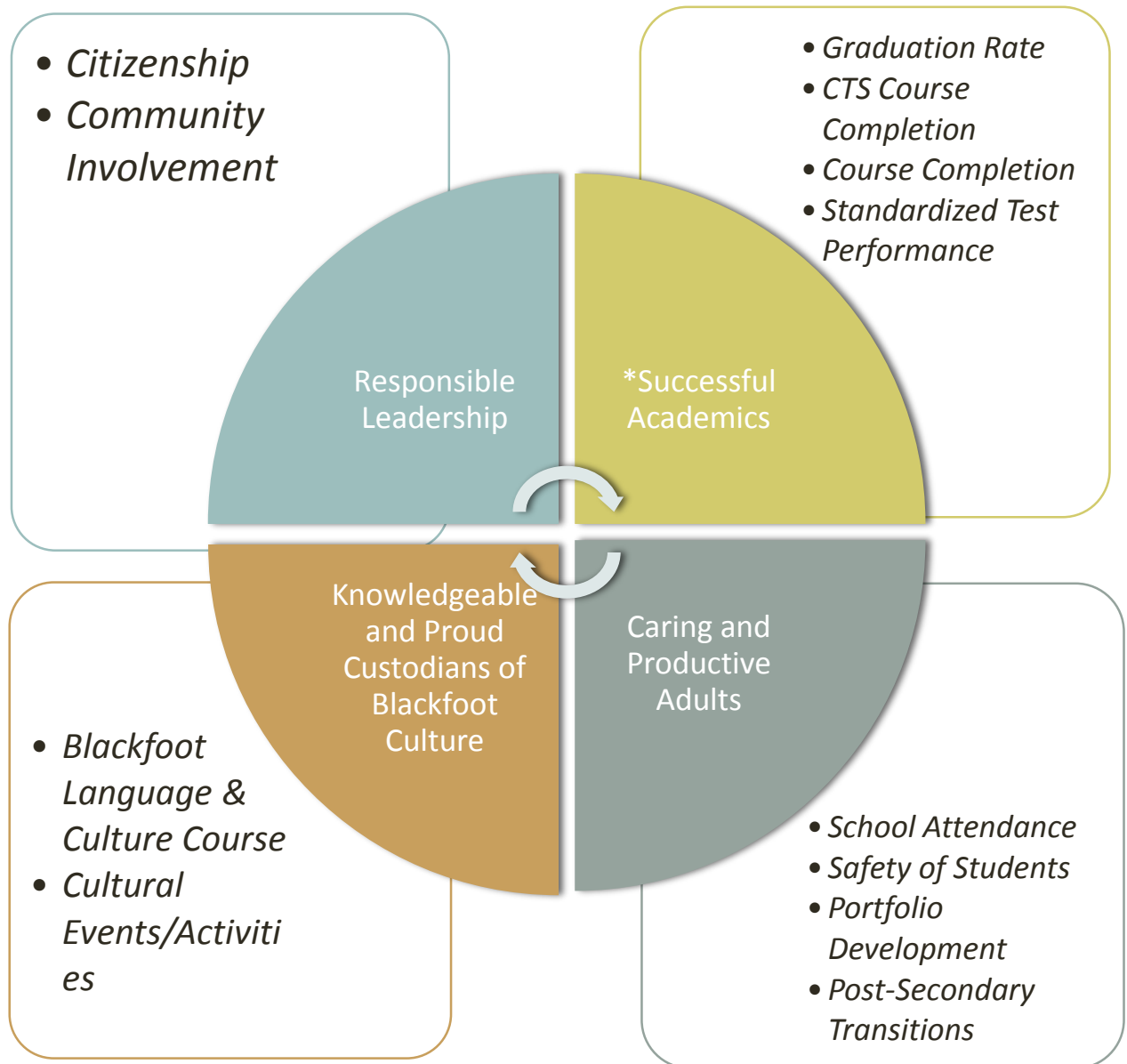
*“To work in partnership with our people to develop caring, responsible, and productive members of our Nation.”*

In order to fulfil this mandate, Kainai High School developed four pillars along with specific measurable objectives to determine the presence of these pillars.

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<sup>3</sup> See above.

The following visual provides an overview of these pillars and their guiding objectives:<sup>4</sup>



\* The following evaluation will focus on the pillar of Successful Academics in order to determine the effectiveness of the Quarter System at KHS.

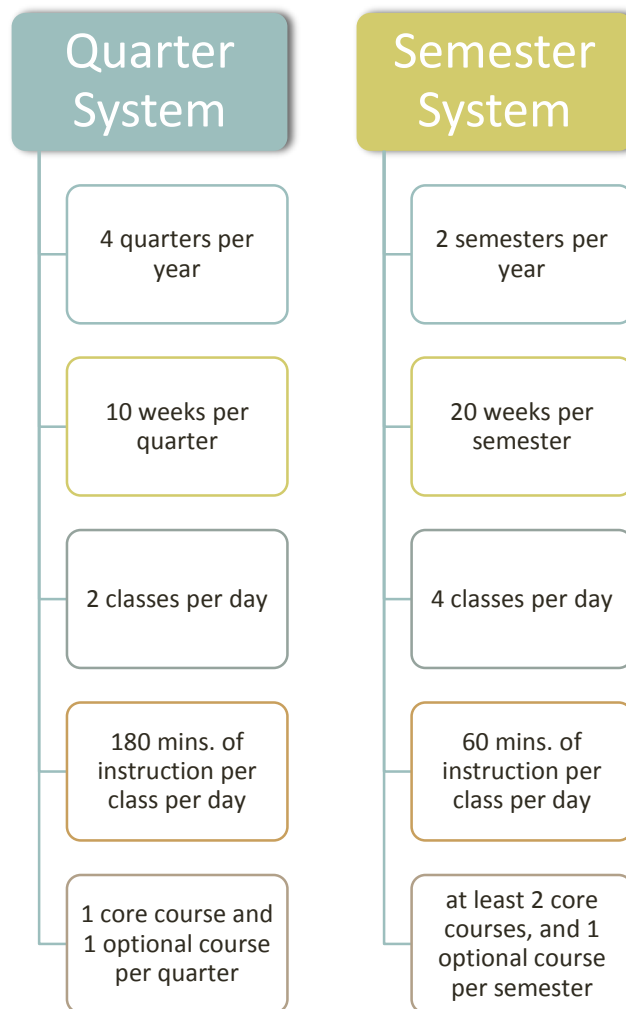
<sup>4</sup> Information regarding the KHS mandate was obtained from the *Kainai High School 4-Year Report (2009-2012)*.

### The Quarter System

In order to effectively design the Quarter System, Kainai High School Administration consulted with:

- Other schools in Alberta currently implementing the Quarter System;
- Parents;
- Staff members and teachers;
- Elders and community members; and
- The Kainai Board of Education.<sup>5</sup>

The Quarter System differs from the Semester System in the following way



<sup>5</sup> Information regarding the Quarter System was obtained from the *Kainai High School 4-Year Report (2009-2012)* and the *Kainai High School Staff Handbook (2014-2015)*.

As students move through the Quarter System, they gain credits quickly and by the end of the Grade 10 they have four required courses and four optional courses. Eventually, however some students may need to take two core courses per quarter in their senior year (but this scheduling is reserved only for those students who can demonstrate the ability to be successful).

The daily schedule for KHS students and staff is as follows:<sup>6</sup>

Time	Monday –Thursday	Time	Friday
8:25-8:55 a.m.	Morning Physical Activity (Walking Club) and attendance	8:25-8:55 a.m.	Morning Physical Activity (Walking Club) and attendance
9:00 a.m.	Core Class Begins – Lecture based	9:00-9:30 a.m.	Tutorial time for core option
10:30-10:35 a.m.	Break (may extend past this time)	9:30-10:00 a.m.	Response to Intervention (for teachers) and independent study time for students
10:35- a.m.12:00 p.m.	Core Class Resumes (independent study; one-on-one assistance; group-bases learning)	10:00-10:45 a.m.	Break
12:00-12:35 p.m.	Lunch	10:45 – a.m. 12:15 p.m.	Optional Course time or time to work on core course
12:35-2:00 p.m.	Optional Class Begins	12:15 p.m.	Dismissal
2:00-2:05 p.m.	Break		
2:05-3:30 p.m.	Optional Class Resumes		
3:30 p.m.	Dismissal		

## Data Collection & Analysis

### *Logic Model*

A logic model has been created to demonstrate the inputs, outputs, outcomes, and time frame of the Student Success Project, and more specially the Quarter System, at Kainai High School. This model has been instrumental in designing and driving the Quarter System Program and evaluating its impact. It provides a visual of nearly all aspects of the project as well as its goals.

### *Quantitative Data Review*

Since its inception, KHS administrators have been collecting quantitative data on the Quarter System. This includes data that would normally be collected (i.e. attendance records, graduation

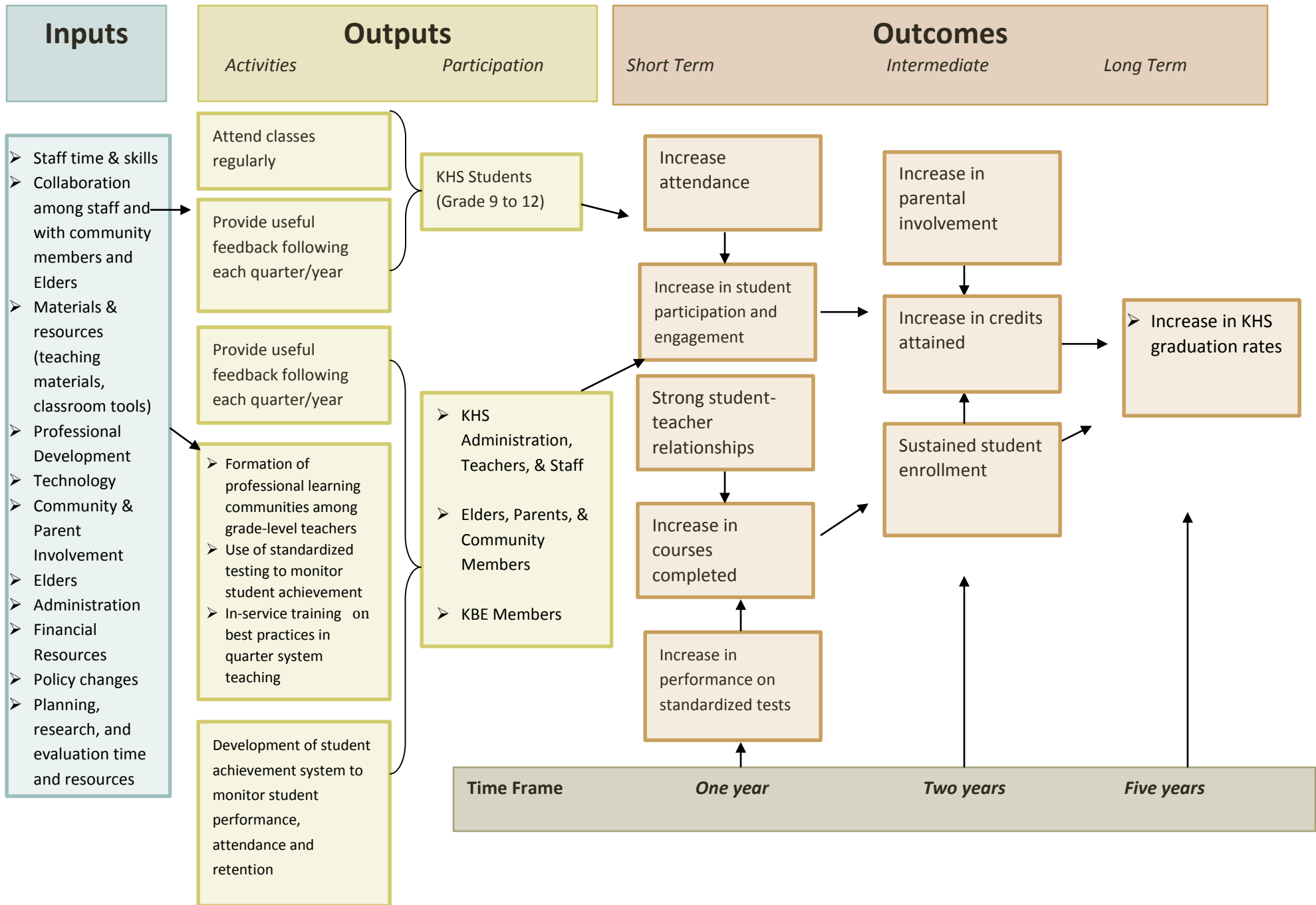
<sup>6</sup> Information regarding the Daily Schedule was obtained from the *Kainai High School Staff Handbook (2014-2015)*.

rates) as well as data that pertains to the effectiveness of and attitudes towards the Quarter System (i.e. quarterly surveys). A presentation and analysis of the most relevant data has been included in this report in order to draw useful conclusions, and possible next steps.

#### *Qualitative Data Review*

As part of the formal evaluation process, in-person interviews were conducted by Infinity Consulting during the evaluation period (May, 2015). KHS staff (including teachers, counsellors, and administrators), parents, Elders, and former and current students were interviewed. The questionnaire consisted of eight open-ended questions given in an interview format so that participants could use their own words while someone else recorded their responses. Given the open-ended nature of this interview, the responses generated span a wide range and encompass many experiences. As such, the transcriptions of these interviews were analyzed and similar responses were grouped together thematically. However, whenever possible direct quotations have been incorporated into the report to capture the participants' actual responses.

## VI. Logic Model



## Data Results

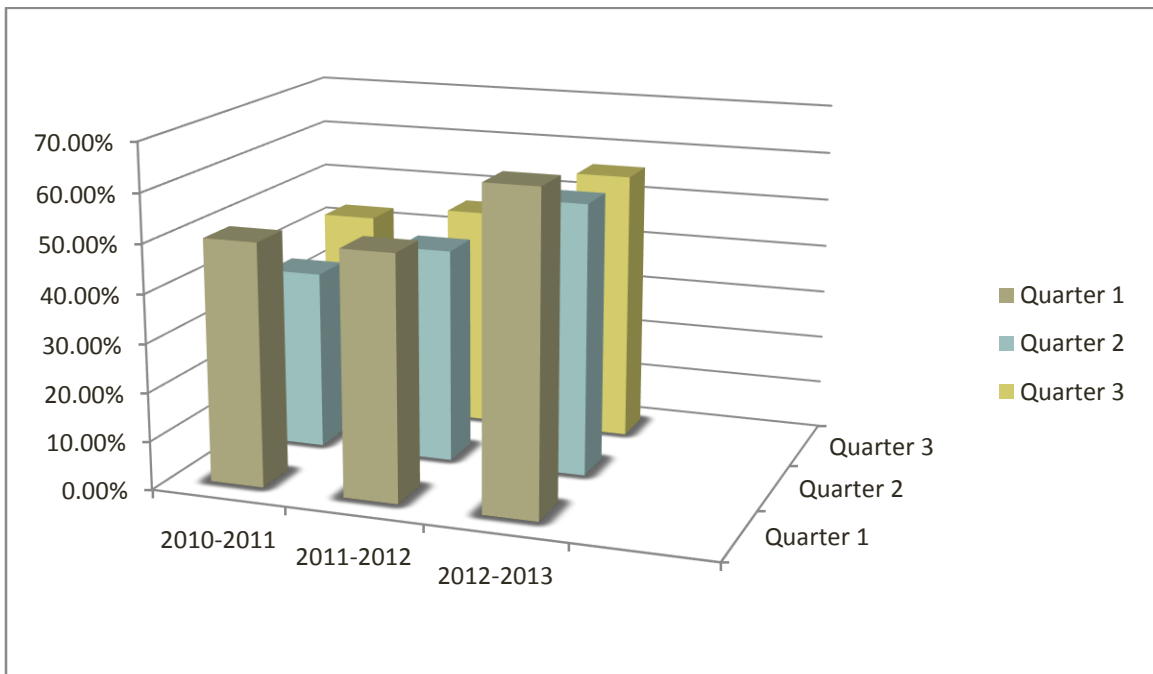
### Overview

The data presented below reflects the short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals of the implementation of the Quarter System at Kainai High School. When possible, data sets from two years prior to the system were used to provide comparisons on outcome measures during the Semester System and Quarter System. In order to effectively measure the success of the project, several data sets were used, as well as qualitative and quantitative surveys and interviews. Through a combination of charts, graphs, and thematic analysis the following outcomes were measured:

- Short-Term Goals: attendance, student participation and engagement, student-teacher relationships, number of course completed, performance on standardized tests.
- Intermediate Goals: parental involvement, number of credits attained, and student enrolment.
- Long-Term Goal: graduation rates.

### Attendance

Attendance data was gathered comparing Quarter 1, Quarter 2, and Quarter 3 data for a period of three school years (2010/2011; 2011/2012; and 2012/2013).

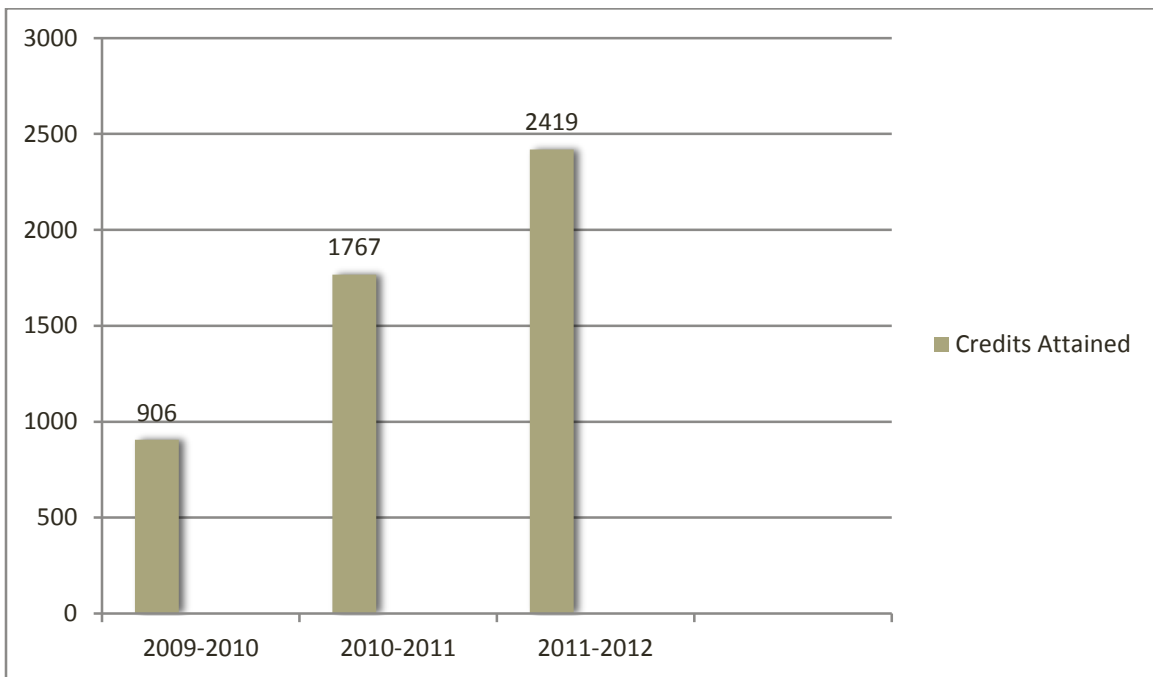


This data reflects two trends:

1. Attendance tends to be highest at the beginning of the year in the first quarter, it then lowers slightly in Quarter 2, and rises again in Quarter 3.
2. The attendance rates demonstrate a steady increase from 2010 to 2013 across all Quarters.

### Credit Attainment

Credit attainment data was gathered comparing the school year prior to the implementation of the Quarter System (2009/2010) and the first two years of the system (2010/2011 and 2011/2012) and indicates a large increase in credits attained.



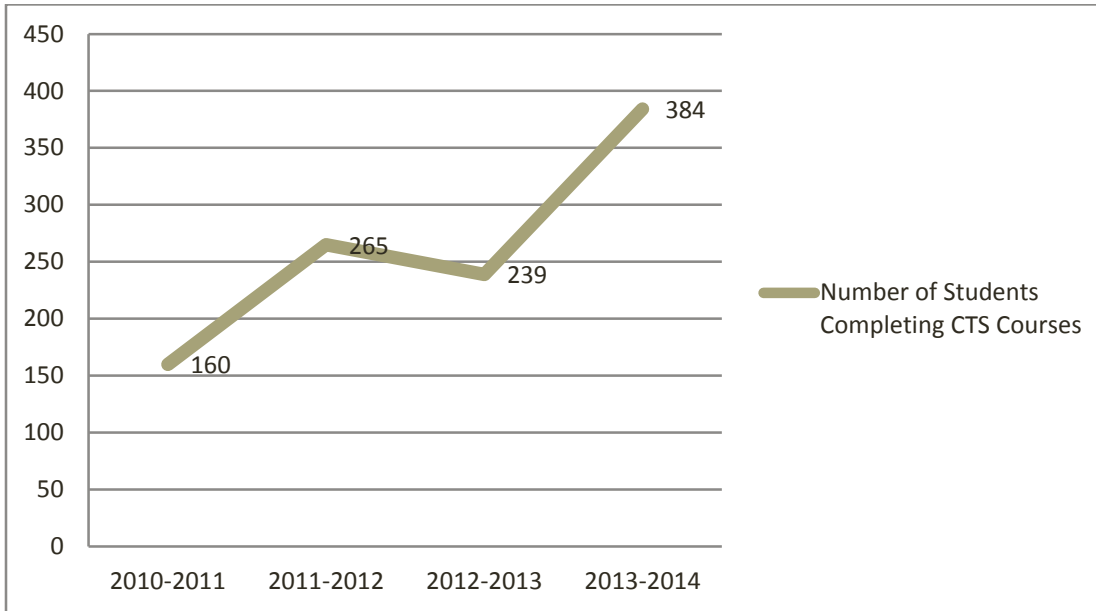
Additional credit attainment data reflects a large increase in credit attainment from the period of 2008-2009 to the 2013-2014 school year.

### Career and Technology Studies Course Completion

Career and Technology Studies (CTS) courses are designed to expose students to the diversity of options and experiences that are available to them following graduation. These courses prepare them for entering the work force and becoming a productive, responsible adult.

The following data has been collected since implementing the Quarter system and shows an increase in the number of students completing CTS courses. The data also reflects a growing student body that is prepared to enter the workforce upon graduation.

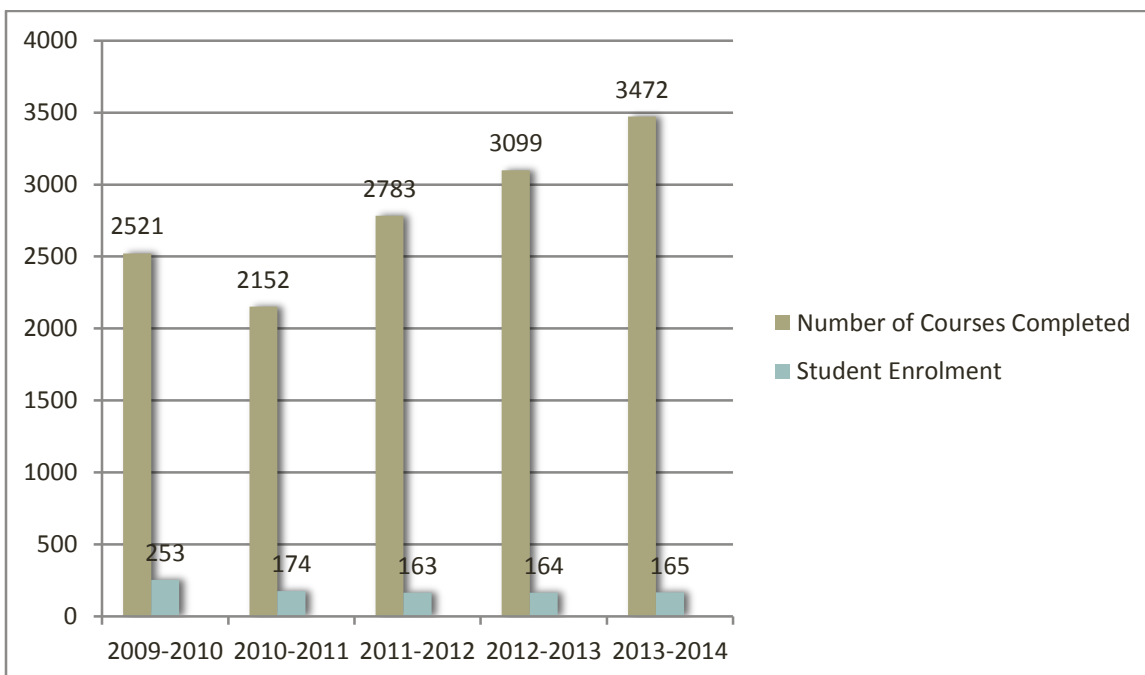




**Overall Course Completion**

Graduating with a high school diploma is the direct result of passing courses and attaining credits. Since 2010, the overall course completing rate has also increased at Kainai High School.

The following data table shows a large and steady increase in courses completed since 2010. In fact, the number of courses completed in the 2013-2014 school year has almost doubled since 2009-2010 despite a decrease in enrolment from 2009 to 2013.

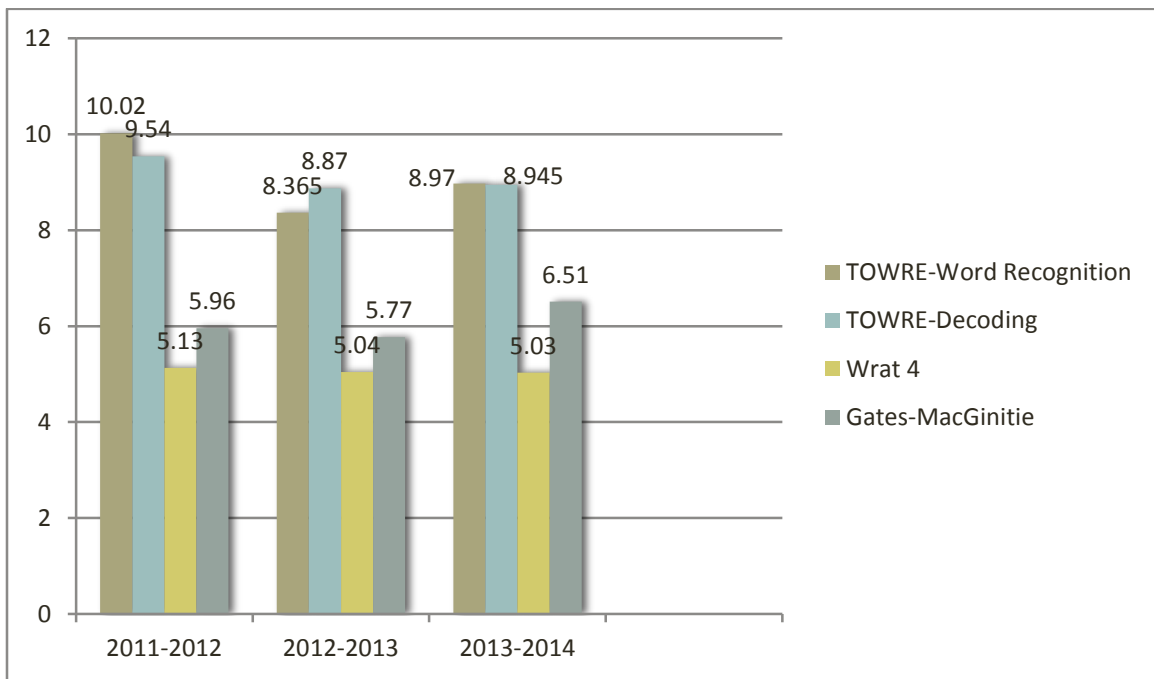


### Standardized Test Performance

Student success at KHS needs to be measured against provincial standards. Therefore, several standardized tests are implemented each year to determine how well KHS students perform and to compare those results to the “norm” across the province of Alberta. These tests are generally administered in both the fall and the spring and the results are then compared. The spring results of four such standardized tests are presented below in order to demonstrate what impact the Quarter System may have on student achievement.

The standardized tests compared are:

- The TOWRE Word Recognition Test;
- The TOWRE Decoding Test;
- The Wrat 4 Math Assessment; and
- The Gates-MacGinitie Comprehension and Vocabulary Assessment.

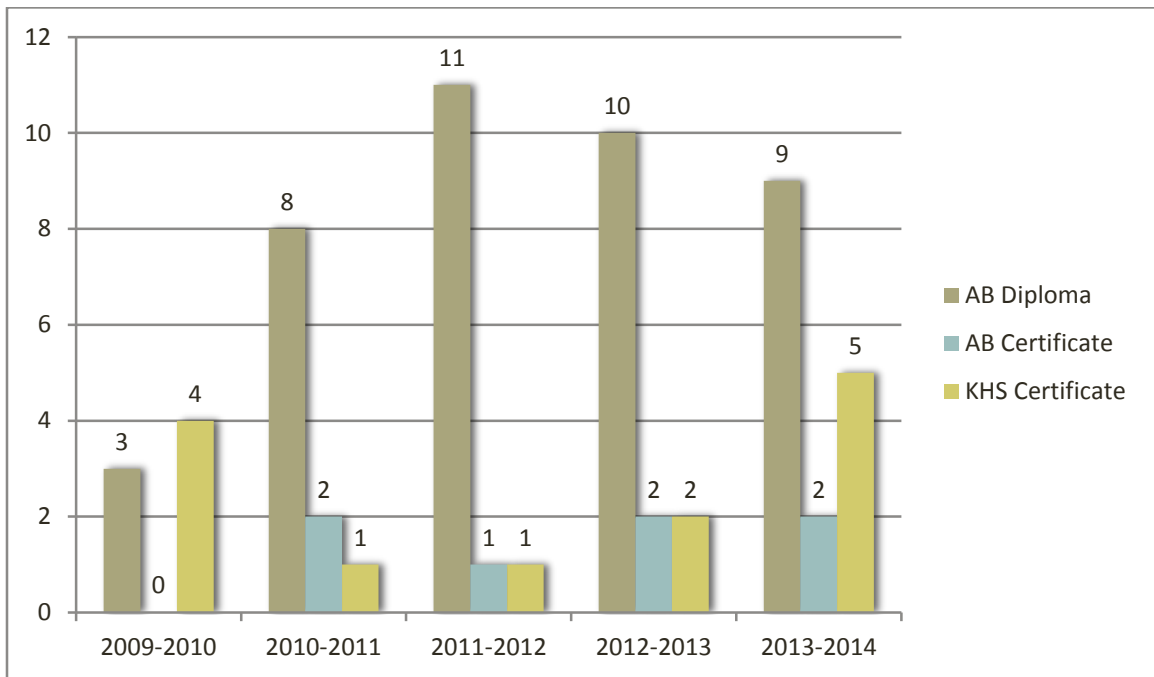


There has been a slight increase in student success on the Gates-MacGinitie Comprehension and Vocabulary Assessment, as well as the TOWRE Decoding Assessment. While it is useful to track student achievement on standardized tests its important to note they do not provide a comprehensive picture of student ability or success (Cherubini, & Hodson, 201; Boaler, 2003 & Kohn, 2010).

### Graduation Rates

The long-term goal of the Quarter System is to increase the graduation rate at Kainai High School. There are three types of certificates a student can earn: The Alberta High School

Diploma, the Alberta Certificate, and the Kainai High School Certificate. The Alberta Diploma is needed as a prerequisite to enter post-secondary institutions.



The most recent 5-year data demonstrates a slight decrease in diplomas awarded in 2013-2014 compared to the peak in 2011-2012; however there has been an increase in the number of KHS certificates awarded. It is important to note that enrolment has fluctuated somewhat and it may take several years for the trend to stabilize and eventually increase.

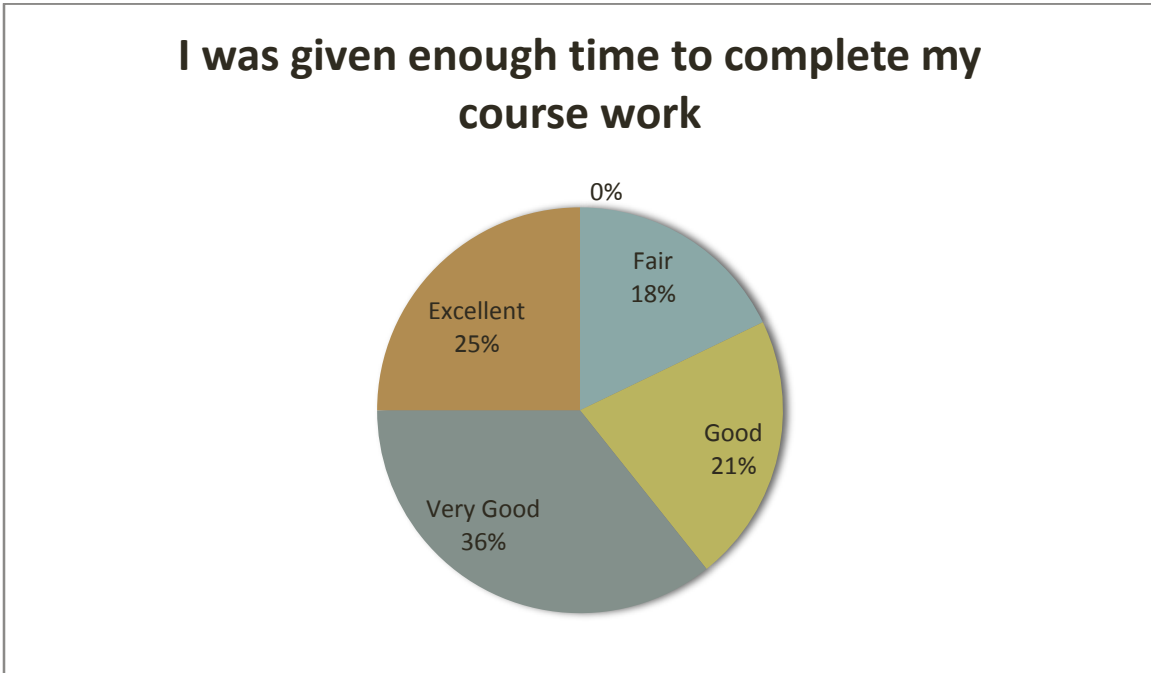
### Quarter System Satisfaction Surveys

During the pilot year of the Quarter System (2010-2011), surveys were conducted following the first three quarters of the school year. Both the students and their parents were surveyed to gain insight into their perspective of the quarter system. In addition, Teacher Satisfaction Surveys were conducted at the end of Quarter 3. The students, teachers, and parents were asked a series of questions using a Likert Scale (1=Poor; 2=Fair; 3=Good; 4=Very Good; 5=Excellent) measuring their attitudes toward the program’s effectiveness. In addition, an open-ended question asked them what they think about the Quarter System program overall. The results of the Quarter 3 surveys were analyzed and the most relevant results are presented below.

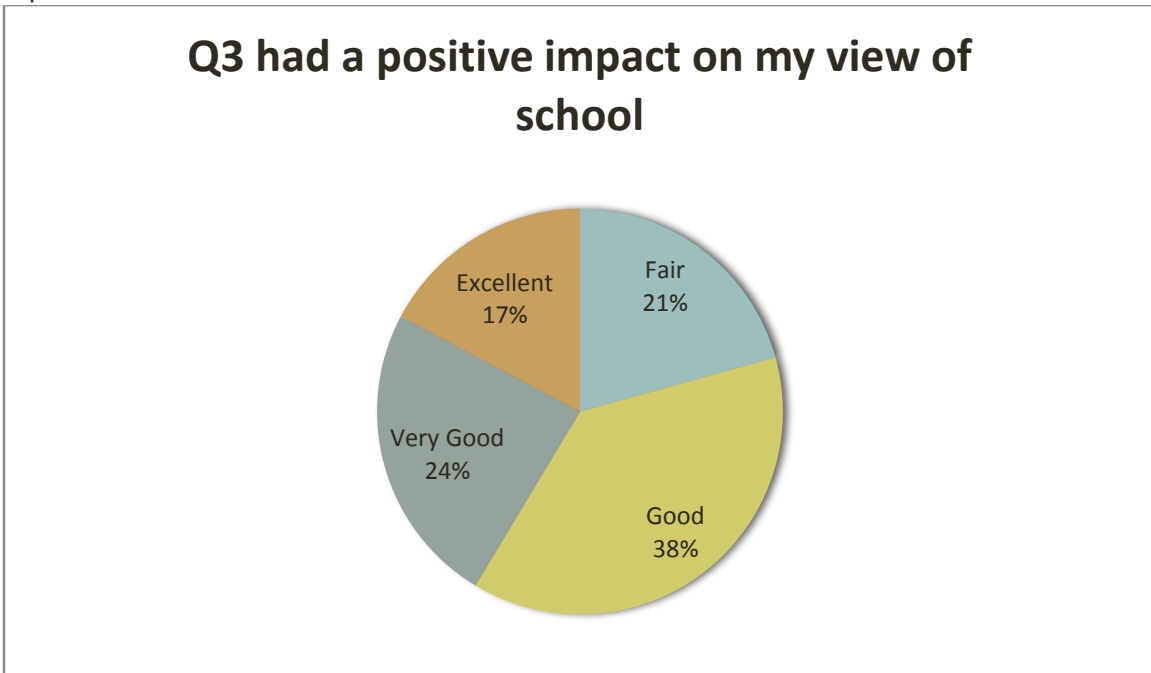
### Student Satisfaction Surveys – Quarter 3, April 2011

#### *Likert Scale Questions*

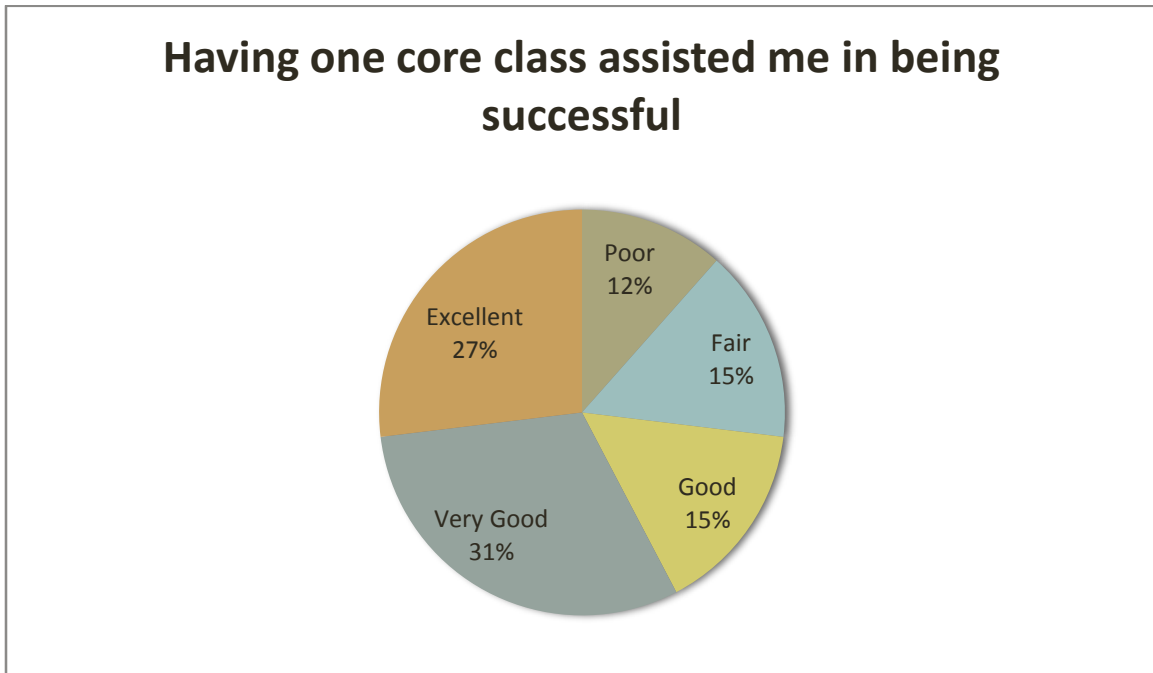
When asked if they were given enough time to complete their course work, the students reported:



When asked if Quarter Three had a positive impact on their view of school, the students reported:



When asked if having one core class assisted them in being successful, the students reported:



#### ***Additional Comments***

The students were also asked to provide additional information that might be helpful in assessing the Quarter System at KHS. Sixteen of those students who completed the survey did not provide additional information, however thirteen students did and their results are summarized below:

- Two students identified the positive aspects of the Quarter System mentioning they “loved it” because it let them get their work done quickly. One student liked the time during the day given to study and complete course work while another liked having the physical activity incorporated into each day.
- Several students stated they did not like the Quarter System. Three students noted that attendance was a huge issue. Two students felt that transportation was an issue and since the Quarter System relies heavily on punctuality and daily attendance, it was hard to be successful.
- Two students mentioned how stressful the Quarter System was, while another two students thought the system was “terrible” as they had to take two core subjects in the same quarter and write two final exams on the same day.
- The students also identified several aspects of the Quarter System they would like the change such as having the core classes in the afternoon, having longer breaks, and providing transportation so the students could attend regularly.

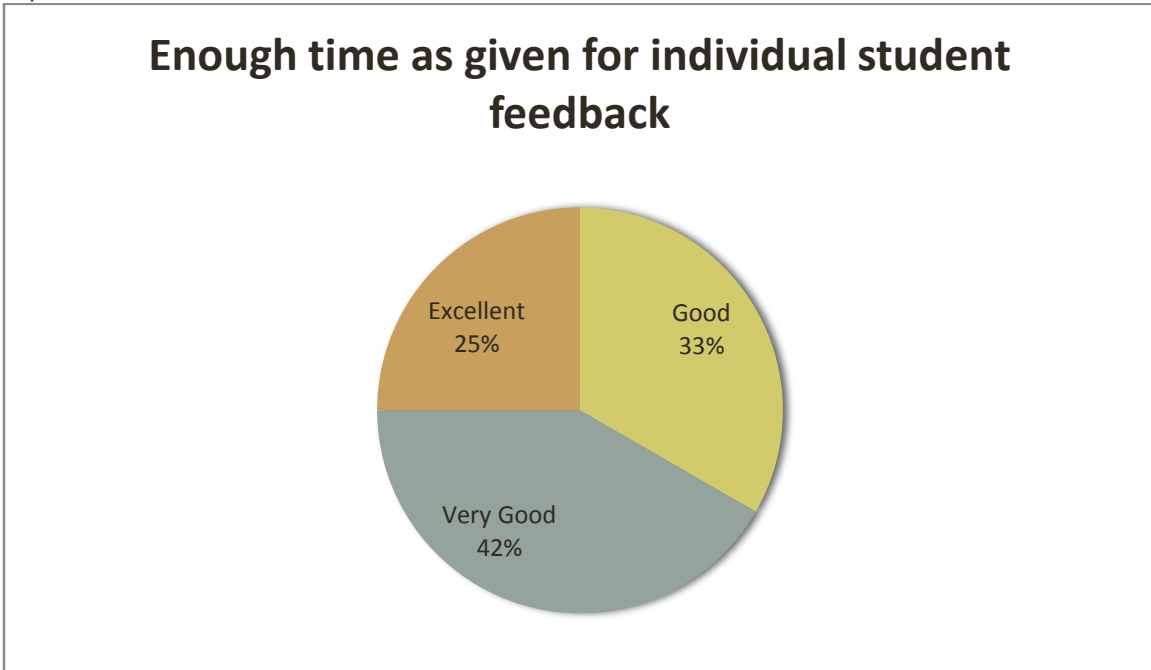
**Teacher Satisfaction Surveys – Quarter 3, April 2011**

*Likert Scale Questions*

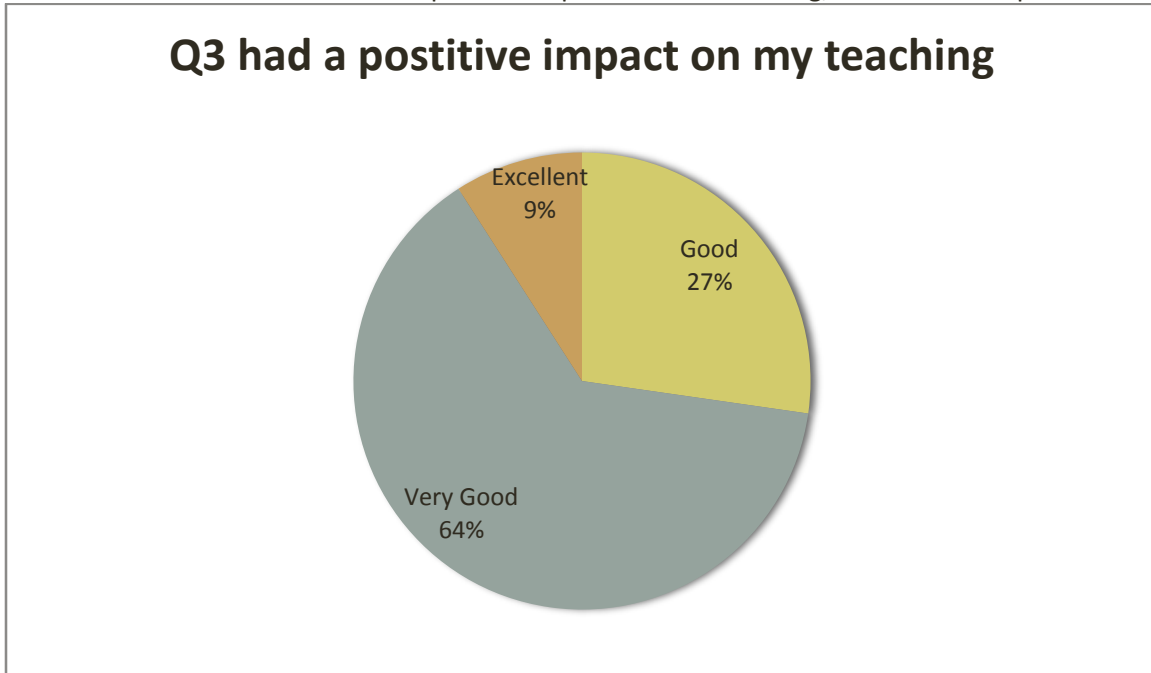
When asked if they were given enough time to complete their course objectives, the teachers reported:



When asked if they were given enough time for individual student feedback, the teachers reported:



When asked if Quarter Three had a positive impact on their teaching, the teachers reported:



#### ***Additional Comments***

The teachers were also asked to provide additional information that might be helpful in assessing the Quarter System at KHS. Most of the teachers provided additional information and their results are highlighted below:

- The teachers identified several positives of the Quarter System including: the formation of deeper teacher-student relationships; the opportunity of students to learn time-management and accountability skills; and the incorporation of hands-on, project-based learning and technology.
- Another teacher mentioned, *“The Quarter System was an opportunity to change old pedagogy and try other methods to cover the fundamentals beyond the text.”*
- One teacher mentioned the student-teacher time throughout the course of the day is extremely helpful.
- The staff also noted several negative aspects such as: not having enough time to cover all course content; the decrease in students’ participation and engagement when they felt overwhelmed and rushed; and several students having to write both A&B parts of course exams in the same day.
- Several teachers identified logistical issue that have implications for the students such as scheduling difficulties and interruptions due to field trips, weather, assemblies, etc. resulting in a loss of several days worth of content.
- Many teachers acknowledged the realities of this new system stating that the teachers had to get used to the pace and be very organized and prepared as it moves very quickly for them as well.

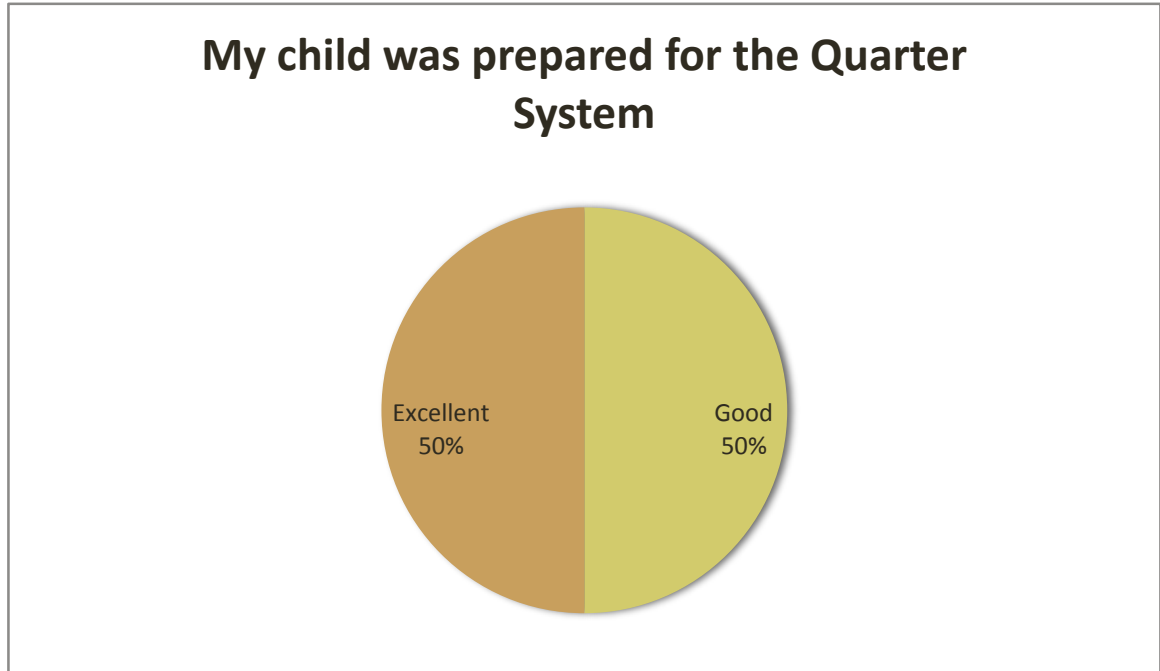
Several needs were also mentioned including: time for student adjustment and transition; visual schedules of the entire year for students; teacher and EA’s flexibility; greater technology such as

a Smart Board; more projects and group-based interactions; and balanced schedules as some students took 2 core classes a Quarter (viewed as extremely stressful).

**Parent Satisfaction Surveys – Quarter 3, April 2011**

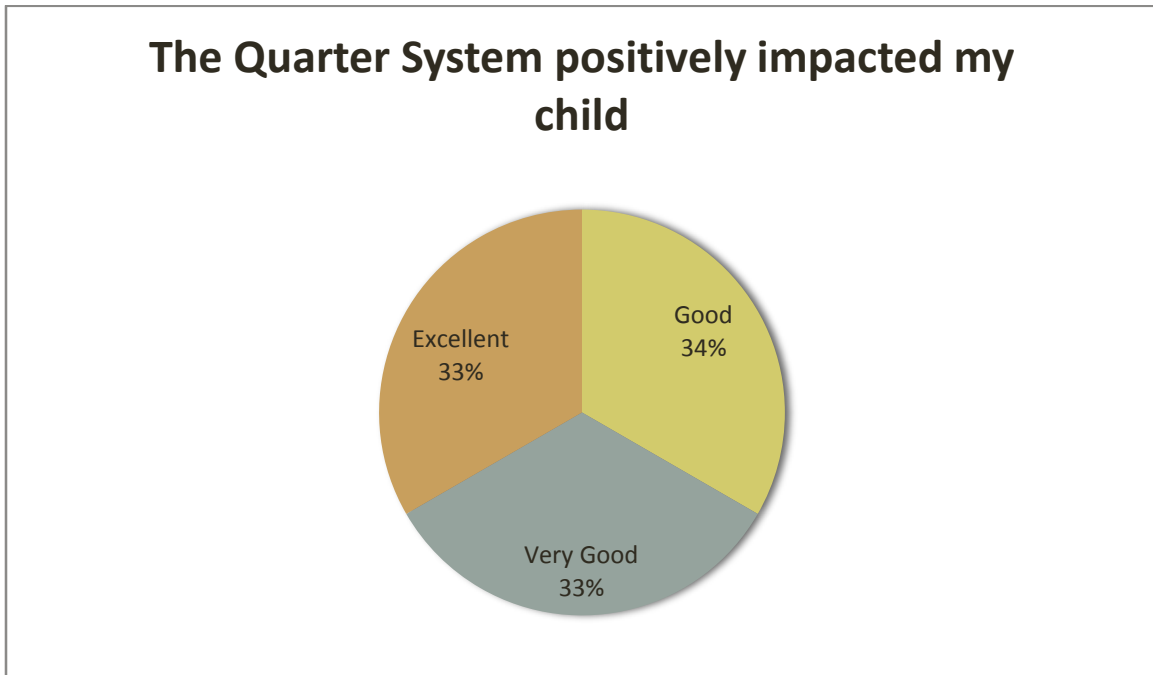
*Likert Scale Questions*

When asked if their child was prepared for the Quarter System, the parents reported:





When asked if the Quarter System positively impacted their child, the parents reported:



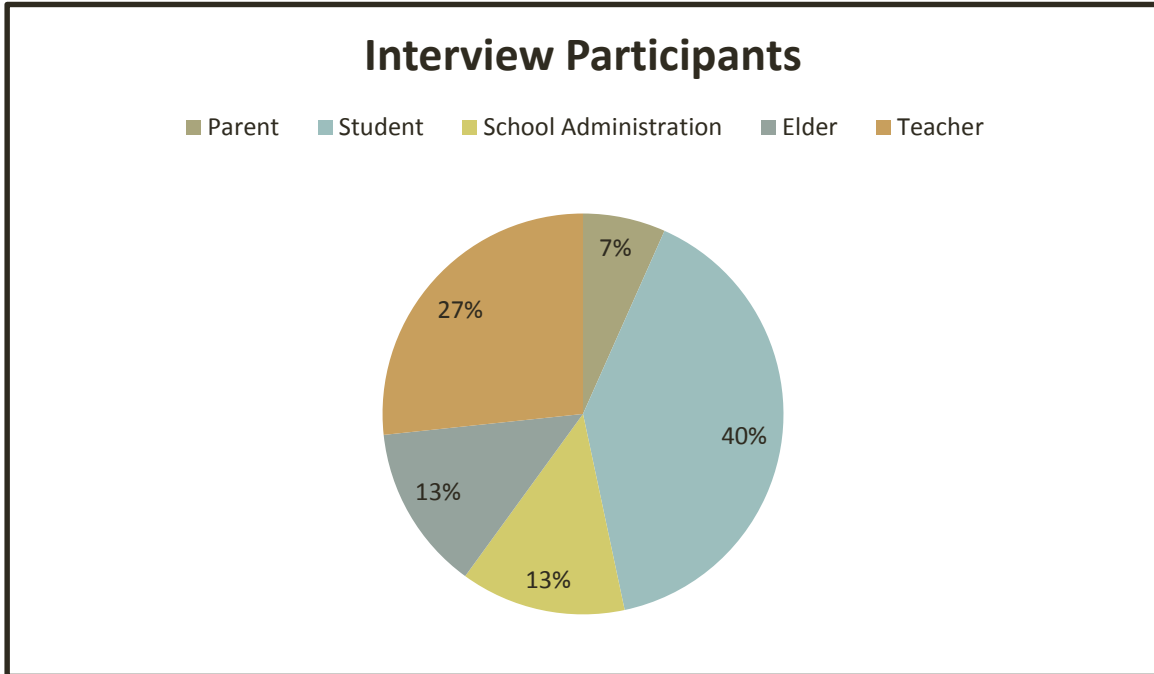
#### ***Additional Comments***

The parents were also asked to provide additional information that might be helpful in assessing the Quarter System at KHS. Over half of the parents provided additional information and their results are highlighted below:

- Three parents did not respond to the question.
- Overall, the parents supported the Quarter System and as one parent claimed: The Quarter System is a *“good idea, [because] my child is excited about school all of the time.”*
- Another parent noted that her son is counting his credits and aware of how many more credits he needs to graduate while another stated it is a good system.
- One parent mentioned that her child had to adjust quickly to the Quarter System and *“it was a shock and a struggle but after the first quarter it got easier.”* Now her son attends regularly and is on task with assignments.
- One parent wrote of the frustration her children expressed because he didn't have time for anything but studying but he wants to graduate and become successful, so there is more pressure with this system.

## Quarter System Qualitative Interviews

The breakdown of the interview participants is as follows:



### Administration, Teachers, & Elders

Q1. *How does the Quarter System work compared to a typical semester system?*

- The administration, teachers, and Elders mentioned several ways in which the Semester System and Quarter System differ. Specifically, they noted the typical semester system allows for two semesters a year with approximately four classes, while the quarter system reverses this and has four quarters with two subjects a quarter (one core class and one optional course). One teacher believes this leaves no room for quitting while the semester time frame allows for students to fall behind and quit. It also means that students will finish faster and earn credits quickly.
- Another staff member noted the students are more motivated to attend school regularly.
- Several teachers discussed the heavy work load placed on the students because of the pace, especially if their attendance is low. One teacher stated, *“Miss one day and you are missing three.”*
- Another staff member mentioned there is a credit recovery options but it is a problem for those who miss classes. There are also limits to what classes students can take as they are only taking 2 classes/quarter (eight classes/year), which does not occur with the semester system.

Q2. What are the main benefits to the students? Please provide examples.

- Two teachers identified the main benefit is that students earn credits and are able to finish faster.
- Two others mentioned the Quarter System allows students to stay focused on one class (core and option) and gives them a break from other subjects. This keeps them from getting bogged down or overloaded with too many core classes at once.
- Another staff member noted that attendance is important and it focuses on students doing well so there is help of they miss and they need to catch up.
- The Elders interviewed acknowledge that there is a large workload placed on the students but the knowledge is delivered quickly so the students can retain the information.
- The Administration identified the concerns that existed during the Semester System because by mid-October students were dropping out and/or their attendance was poor. The Quarter System gives them a chance to finish courses quickly so they don't lose interest or fall behind.
- The Administration also noted that the students can connect with the staff during the longer class times (since a class is three hours long in the morning or the afternoon).
- Both administrators interviewed stated the Quarter System has a positive impact on student-teacher relationships. As one administrator stated *"the teachers develop meaningful relationships and deliver content, project-based learning, which is more hands-on and practical instead of textbook learning."*

Q3. Do you see any areas for improvement? If so, what would you recommend? Provide an example if possible.

- Several areas for improvement were identified including: more professional development to assist teachers and staff to adjust to the new system to increase support and accountability; ways to improve attendance otherwise the students fall behind in their work; greater focus on teacher prep time so they can create project-based learning experiences to keep the learning active and engaging.
- One participant stated, *"[there is] no need for improvement at this time. I haven't seen too many problems and while this program many not work for all students at all schools right now, for our students, it seems to be working."*
- One Elder discussed the need for stronger enforcement of the rules so the students can learn boundaries and be accountable, while another Elder mentioned the need for better attendance and parental participation.
- The Administration identified several areas of need including: focusing on teachers and students developing more meaningful relationships; focusing on engagement as much as attendance; building capacity; providing more professional development opportunities (especially for new teachers); creating incentives for students to attend; and implementing a credit recovery program.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Administration is currently developing a Credit Recovery Program where students can work on Fridays to recover credits from courses they were not able to pass initially.

*Q4. Since implementing the Quarter System what has been the biggest change (positive or negative) that you have noticed in terms of the student body? Please give an example.*

- The following positive changes were identified: increase in student success; increase in the number of credits attained; rise in peer support; and greater independence among the student body.
- The Administration discussed that the students are more in tune and more engaged and they know what classes they need to have to graduate, whereas previously, they did not know.
- They also noted that the teachers are learning how to make longer classes more effective and are developing professional learning communities to learn how to improve their teaching. The Administration acknowledged that longer, more focused classes prepares the students for college where three to four hour courses or labs might be the norm.
- Some negative aspects of the program were also mentioned including: the difficulty in having information compacted and trying to successfully teach that information in half of the time; a decrease in attendance and participation throughout the year; a lack of support and communication from administrative staff; and a lack of good role models in the school.
- One Elder noted that when speaking of negative impacts it is important to note that there is an intergenerational disconnect because of Residential Schools so the parents and families don't want to be involved with the school.

*Q5. What have students told you about the Quarter System since it has been implemented? Please provide an example.*

- Most of the teachers state the feedback from the students has been positive because they only have to focus on 2 classes at a time, they like the creativity the teachers put forth, and they feel they have more time with teachers.
- Another teacher commented that the majority of the students appreciate that they have time to comprehend and learn and there is time every day for one-on-one support.
- The Elders reported the students who have graduated speak of the benefits and the encouragement and help from the staff.
- The Administration mentioned that the students value learning more in a day and they are more conformable and confident and are not criticizing or complaining as much. They are more engaged and they are doing more cross-curricular learning, like phys. Ed and science together (i.e. learning about bird migration by hiking and taking field trips; learning about animals and habitats while fishing; building wind turbines to learn about energy).

*Q6. Do you think the Quarter System supports students better than the semester system? If so, how?*

- All of the participants felt the Quarter System supported students differently than the Semester System noting it fosters collaboration among staff and students as everyone works together to help students achieve success. It requires less classes, less stress, and keeps students motivated as they have more time during the day to work on projects and assignments.

- One staff member discussed how the students' home environment and circumstances can be complex and challenging. The Quarter System allows them to enter and exit at different times. It gives them flexibility because they can miss a class in a quarter and it doesn't ruin their entire year or their chances for graduation or success.
- One Elder mentioned that the system is less stressful for the students and the teachers, while the other stated it is easier to have the students work on one core class and one optional class and then move on.
- The Administration claimed the Quarter System provided them with the opportunity to connect with students and get to know them, and there have been higher success rates in terms of courses completed and credits earned.

#### **Additional Comments**

- Several positive aspects of the Quarter System were highlighted again including: its quick pace; its greater focus on comprehension; one-on-one support; an increase in confidence and relationships; and an increase in community involvement.
- One Elder noted that as a result of the Quarter System, the poor reputation of the school has changed; it is now seen as a place for learning and growing not a negative place (as it once was because of residential schools). There is community support and investment and a change in perspective.

#### **Parents**

*Q1. What are the main benefits to the students? Please provide examples.*

- All of the parents mentioned that their children reported the teachers have more time in the Quarter System to help them and the teachers are more patient and not as overwhelmed.
- Furthermore, parents noted that their children are able to focus on one thing at a time and have time during the day to get one-on-one help if needed. The teachers make the students feel confident and comfortable in the Quarter System.

*Q2. Do you see any areas for improvement? If so, what would you recommend? Provide an example if possible.*

- The parents did not feel that anything needs to change as the school is doing a good job and are on top of the students. As one parent states, *"they encourage them and my child is succeeding. If she started to fail they would be on top of her because their goal is to help her succeed. It is great prep for college."*

*Q3. Since implementing the Quarter System what has been the biggest change (positive or negative) that you have noticed in your child(ren)? Please give an example.*

- The biggest challenge identified was overcoming fear of the new system and as one parent claimed, *"my child was afraid in the beginning but when she got here she fit right in with the kids and school. She was conformable with the staff and they welcomed her and wanted her to succeed. Now other kids look up to her and see her as an inspiration. She is learning more about herself and gaining confidence so it is more than just getting and education."*

Q4. *Would you recommend this system to other high schools? Why or why not?*

- The parents agreed that this system might not work for all kids but for this community it is the right choice.

#### **Additional Comments**

- Finally, one parent states, *“If you slack in any class in the Quarter System you will fail. My daughter always has her nose in the books, which is good. It prepares them for modern society, which is fast-paced and you have to be able to catch up.”*

#### **Former & Current Students**

Q1. *Is there anything about the Quarter System that makes it unique or different? Do you think that it is beneficial?*

- The students identified the following benefits: they can get their work done and stay on top of everything; the classes finish quickly; the classes are longer and give time to do assignments during the day
- Another student discussed that it is a unique benefit that you can use the afternoon periods to catch up on work from the morning class (core class) and another states, *“I haven’t failed any classes because it is easier to keep up.”*
- Yet another student mentioned, *“It’s a big work load but you only have to focus on two classes at once. Attendance is important. If you attend and you participate it is beneficial.”*
- One student noted that the Quarter System *“is like having a 24 hour job but it prepares you for university. I decided I could handle university after being successful in the Quarter System because it teaches you to be on time and to hand in your work.”*

Q2. *What do you think about the Quarter System? Do you think it is better than the Semester System or would you prefer to be on the Semester System? Please explain.*

- Most of the students prefer the Quarter System stating: its not as much of a workload; there is an increased focus on athletics, an increase in time with the teachers; it provides more time to work on assignments; and you only have to focus on two classes at once.
- One student preferred the Semester System because it’s longer and allows for more time to get work done. She/he felt the Quarter System was too fast-paced.

Q3. *Since being in the Quarter System have you experienced any benefits? If so, tell us what some of those benefits are.*

- The students identified several benefits including: increase in studying because of the quick deadlines; a tendency to learn more, do more work, and get more credits; an increase in attentiveness; the ability to focus sharply on one core class at a time; an

increase in time with teachers; more hands-on learning; and valuable preparation for college.

*Q4. Since being in the Quarter System have you experienced anything you would consider to be negative? If so, please explain.*

- Some negative aspects of the Quarter System were highlighted including: difficulty catching up if one falls behind; lack of help from teachers when they are busy; challenging exams; and the expectation to make up all missed work.

*Q5. What do your peers think of the Quarter System? Can you give an example?*

- The students noted that either their peers love the Quarter System or they dislike it. According to one student, *“The ones that fell behind hate it. I fell behind but I persevered and was successful. The ones who were struggling really needed help from the teachers [and] that would have helped.”*
- The students that like the Quarter System prefer the 3-hour classes and like that they can ask questions and receive ample help from the teachers.

*Q6. Would you recommend the Quarter System to other youth on other First Nations or other high schools? Why or why not?*

- All of the students interviewed said they would recommend the Quarter System. As one student mentions, *“I have siblings coming from other First Nations schools and other public schools and I think this system prepares you more for university and the real world because it teaches you about deadlines. Once you get gym it’s lots of fun.”*
- Additional reasons for recommending this system include: it’s a good fit in many First Nations communities; it’s flexible; and how it pushes the students to study more at school and at home as well as to adapt.

## Results & Conclusions

### Overview

This section will provide highlights from the data results presented in the previous section as well as the main conclusions that can be drawn from evaluating the program overall. While the purpose of this evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of the Quarter System program at Kainai High School, the richness of the data gathered cannot be overlooked. For example, the achievement of data-focused goals such as attendance rates and standardized test performances should not overshadow the increase in student-identified feelings of confidence and pride.

### Analysis

These results have yielded a number of conclusions regarding the overall effectiveness of the implementation of the Quarter System at Kainai High School. In general, most of the feedback is extremely positive. The data demonstrates an increase in student attendance, and credit attainment, which will have a future impact on graduation rates.

#### ***Highlights from School-Based Data:***

- In the first three years of the Quarter System, attendance steadily increased and was the highest in the first Quarter each year.
- The number of credits attained each year nearly doubled during the first year of the credit system and increased again the following year.
- The number of courses completed has increased since 2009, despite a decrease in enrollment. The number of course completed in 2013-2014 was the highest KHS has ever reported.
- There has been an increase in student success on the Gates-MacGinitie Comprehension and Vocabulary Assessment and the TOWRE Decoding Assessment.
- There has been an increase in the number of students graduating with KHS certificates since 2009.



**Highlights from the Satisfaction Surveys:**

- 61% of the students surveyed felt strongly that they were given enough time to complete their course work (a rating of 4 or higher).
- 91% of teachers reported ample teaching time and 67% felt strongly that they were given enough time for student feedback (a rating of 4 or higher).
- 58% of students strongly felt that having one core class at a time helped them achieve success (a rating of 4 or higher).
- Half of the parents felt strongly that their children were prepared for the Quarter System (a rating of 5).
- 41% of students, 73% of teachers, and 66% of parents felt strongly that the Quarter System had a positive impact on teaching and learning (a rating of 4 or higher).
- All participants identified the strengths of the system such as increased credit attainment and preparation for university. However several needs were identified such as more one-on-one time with teachers, a focus on professional development, and immediate assistance for students who are struggling.

**Highlights from In-Person Interviews:**

- The biggest difference identified between the Semester System and the Quarter System is the faster pace of the Quarter System and the quick delivery of information. Once the students adjust to this difference however they are generally successful.
- The main benefits presented are: only having to focus on one core course at a time; earning credits quickly; having more time with teachers; and having hands-on learning opportunities.
- Some the negative aspects mentioned were: students feeling rushed and overwhelmed; a lack of participation and engagement; teachers feeling frustrated and underprepared; and students falling behind in course work.
- Several recommendations for improving the system were provided such as: greater engagement of community members; longer breaks; more physical activity; transportation; professional development; more teacher preparation time; and a focus on transitioning Grade 9 students.

## Conclusions

Several conclusions can be made from the above analysis:

- The Quarter System is currently helping many students achieve success at KHS, however for those students who struggle, immediate and comprehensive intervention is needed.
- The pace of the System is quick and mirrors that of the “real-world” yet requires accountability and preparation for all involved including staff, administration, Elders, parents and students.
- The quantitative data yields the achievement of many of the goals of the System such as an increase in courses completed and credits attained.
- The qualitative analysis reveals that the Quarter System is an integral component of the Student Success Program at KHS.

## Accomplishments & Lessons Learned

### Accomplishments

The Quarter System had several accomplishment including increases in attendance, courses completed, and credits attained. Projections estimate that these numbers will continue to increase for the 2014-2015 school year and beyond, and eventually this will lead to an increase in graduation rates.

However a greater accomplishment is the positive attitude KHS staff, students, and parents feels toward the Quarter System. Those involved feel deeply connected to one another and rely on each other to be successful. The teachers look to the parents and the students to design and deliver accessible course content and the students in turn, look to their teachers and parents for guidance and help to learn and grow.

Perhaps one of the most telling quotes of the success of the system came from one current student who wrote: *“it is like having a 24 hour job but it prepares you for university. I decided I could handle university after being successful in the Quarter System because it teaches you to be on time and to hand in your work.”* Clearly the students are aware of the how this system will impact their future and are confident in their abilities and are preparing for post-secondary study.

### Lessons Learned

Several lessons have been learned in the past four years of implementing the Quarter System including:

- Staff collaboration and communication is essential.
- Student intervention (RTI and other assistance) needs to be immediate and effective.
- Evaluation must be continuous and consistent.
- Training and professional development is important.
- Consultation with parents and students is foundational.
- Learning must be project-based, hands-on, and experiential.

### Limitations

Several limitations were encountered during the infancy of the Quarter System. There were limited supports in place for those students with learning difficulties or who previously struggled in school. It appeared that those students who fell through the cracks in the Semester System continued to fall through the cracks in the Quarter System. However, improvements in the structure of the system (i.e. the creation of the credit recovery program) have assisted greatly in narrowing those gaps. The KHS Administration immediately created weekly Response to Intervention (RTI) meetings to assist students who needed additional supports in the classroom.

Another issue with regards to the Quarter System was the lack of professional development and training for staff to successfully teach longer classes for a shorter period of time. Weekly staff meetings, additional professional development workshops, consultation with schools who have successfully implemented the Quarter System, and the use of weekly professional learning communities, assisted in overcoming this issue.

The Elders interviewed noted a further limitation as they mentioned the need for greater community involvement and parent participation. They believe that years of intergenerational trauma, racism, and the Residential School System have created a disconnect between families and the school. While most families recognize the importance of school, they find it challenging to get involved and participate. Greater community participation would strengthen the Quarter System success as parents and community members could assist students with projects, course work, and experiential hands-on learning. According to the Elders, the knowledge is there, but the relationship still needs work.

### Next Steps

#### Focus on the Future

The evaluative process yielded several next steps in order for Kainai High School to move forward and continue to achieve success with the Quarter System as well as the Student Success Program in general. Through greater capacity building, professional development, student

transitions and interventions, and evaluation, the Student Success Program at KHS will continue to grow and thrive.

### **Building Capacity**

In order for KHS to grow and strengthen, it must build capacity. The Administration acknowledges that this is an essential piece of program delivery but it is also one of the most challenging aspects as it requires considerable time and resources to build and sustain relationships, encourage investment, and ensure integrity. The current Administration has made it a priority to establish relationships with Elders, educational agencies, the Kainai Band Council, and funders to achieve better educational outcomes for their students.

### **Professional Development**

Time and again, KHS staff called for greater professional development to assist in effective program delivery. Whenever a shift is made from traditional teaching pedagogy and practices, training and preparation must precede it. Implementing the Quarter System requires a tremendous amount of planning, collaboration, and learning on the part of the staff. Teachers become used to developing their teaching skills and practices in a certain system and when that shifts, their approaches to teaching must adapt as well. This requires patience and preparation. Teachers need the space to learn and grow as professional and the opportunity to be successful in a supportive environment. This should not be overlooked and the opportunities for professional development and support should be continuous.

### **Transitions & Interventions**

The Quarter System at KHS will only be as successful as its most vulnerable students. Those who have learning difficulties, have experienced childhood trauma, and/or have challenges being successful at school require the most assistance. While it is often challenging to assist those students who struggle the most, it is essential if real changes are going to occur. The enrolment or graduation rates, for example, will only rise if all students are present and learning.

A greater effort into transitioning students into the Quarter System following Grade 9 as well as immediate RTI when a student begins to struggle are foundational. Students should be given as many opportunities as possible to learn along side their peers and may require work to be adapted to meet their needs (i.e. shortened assignments, the use of assisted technology, choices in projects). Peer-to-peer support networks are also important and it may be useful to pair senior students who have knowledge of the Quarter System with junior students. It gives those senior students a chance to learn leadership skills, while the younger students gain valuable information about the Quarter System. Any and all efforts to prepare new students and intervene when students are not achieving success will positively impact this program.

### On-Going Evaluation

A large part of the current success of the Quarter System at KHS has been the continuous and purposeful evaluation of the program. Since its infancy, KHS Administrators have been gathering data from school and government records, surveying students, teachers, and parents, analyzing test results. They have also been consulting with the KBE and other schools using the Quarter System, and seeking input and assistance from all those involved and invested.

While this report is a formal evaluation of the program, it relied heavily on the data already collected and analyzed by the KHS staff. It is of the utmost importance that KHS continues to seek the input of students, staff, Elders, and parents in order to expose barriers and improve what already works. A close examination of the numbers is also essential including achievement scores, attendance and enrolment rates, course completion rates, and graduation rates. Finally KHS should continue consulting with other communities who have also implemented this system. There are opportunities for further growth and collaboration.

### Interactive Tools

The following web links could be useful and may provide Indspire with additional information:

1. The Kainai High School Website

➤ <http://khs.kainaied.ca/>

2. This video showcases the *Kainai High Schools Daily Physical Activity Program* (in partnership with Ever Active School), which was implemented prior to the Quarter System and is a part of the overall Student Success Program at KHS.

➤ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3fJkilaOKc>

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**Consent & Information Forms**

**Evaluation Research**  
**Indspire (Lead Researcher Dr. Carrie Bourassa, Infinity Consulting)**  
**2932 St. James Cres., Regina, SK, S4V 2Z1**  
**P: 306-535-6855**

**Letter of Invitation to participate in the Evaluation Research Project of Indspire-Kanai High School – Quarter System and consent form.**

**To**

Annette Bruised Head, Principal  
P.O. Box 2640  
Cardston, AB  
(Southern AB – Border)  
TOK OKO

Annette.bruisedhead@kanaied.ca

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Carrie Bourassa and I am the Lead Researcher for the evaluation research project wherein I will be researching, with you, on your Quarter System using a Logic Model and Evaluation Framework planned for this project. Along with this model, is the application of the Indigenous foundational principles developed by Indspire.

I am inviting you and your Quarter System personnel to participate in this evaluation research project (either in an individual or group setting). The purpose of the study is to evaluate the Kanai High School Quarter System initiative for determining its suitability for Indspire's Nurturing Capacity program. Participation is completely voluntary and your decision to participate or not participate will in no way affect your existing relationships, work situation or provision of services.

This study is part of a joint research project between Kanai High School - Quarter System and Indspire. This research may also involve graduate students (or student researchers) who will work on the project in their fulfilment of their degree requirements and may be funded by the Research Contractor, Dr. Carrie Bourassa. This opportunity helps build student's research capacity.

**WHAT IS INVOLVED?**

Depending on the stage of the evaluation research process, the following will take place:

- Individuals (including parents and students) who could be interviewed will be identified and names provided to the researcher for interviewing purposes
- Collection of relevant demographic data
- Observation of Quarter System program and activities
- Teleconference meeting with Ms. Annette Bruised Head, Principal to discuss the process given tight timelines

- Interviews with Quarter System staff, students (former and present), parents, Elders and administrators to document their experience and hear their perceptions of Quarter System model.
- Determine the types of collection of various data related to student use of the centre.
- Documentation of specific strategies used for student supports.
- Collect data that shows increase in attendance due to the program and/or increased graduation rates or student performance (to be provided by Kanai High School administration).
- Document how, if any, the Quarter System reflects the seven foundational guiding principles Indigenous for educational practice.

There will be no remuneration for participating in this research.

A few weeks after your session, one of the researchers will contact you to offer you the opportunity to review your transcript from the session. If you choose to review your transcription, you will be provided with an **electronic** copy of your comments and asked to review it and add any comments that you would like to make using track changes unless you request a hard copy to be couriered. You will also have an opportunity to withdraw any comments that you wish not to have included in the research.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

The direct benefits of participating in this study include:

- The ability to voice concerns and hopes about the Quarter System program and the learning that may come from gaining new insights and perspectives;
- The sharing of resources on challenges, solutions and positive outcomes; and
- The opportunity to have your voice heard, your opinions valued and respected.

For the larger scientific community and the community at large, this research may offer insights into the types of programming needed to address the needs of Indigenous students.

#### **MINIMAL RISKS**

There also may be minimal risks associated with participation as some individuals could experience psychological risks or social risks related to voicing their opinion in a group setting. Care will be exercised if there are issues that need follow up. If deemed necessary, individuals will be provided with names of people who could most appropriately sort through any issues.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

In the research gathering session, all the information you provide will be considered confidential. Prior to starting the session you will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement to indicate that you will respect the confidentiality of the interviewed discussion.

In written reports of this research and oral presentations, excerpts from the research may be discussed but no names will be associated with any quotes. This helps us to represent your voice and opinion without compromising your confidentiality. The audiotapes will only be used for the purpose of creating written records and will not be



associated with your name. These audiotapes/computer video files will be kept in locked filing cabinets/ secure password protected computers and will only be viewed by the researchers and research assistants who have signed confidentiality agreements.

Data collected during this study will be kept for five years and stored in locked filing cabinets. All data will be confidentially shredded or destroyed after seven years unless phases of the research are still occurring. Only the researchers and research assistants will have access to the data. All individuals who have access to the data will sign confidentiality agreements.

#### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. It is very important to us that you decide whether or not you would like to share your thoughts with us.

#### **PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in professional journals, presented at conferences and on Indspire's website. Feedback about this study will be mailed to you if you choose to provide your address. The results will be available September 30, 2015. If you have any questions at any point during the study, or after the study please contact (Angie Krenn at Indspire by phone (519) 445-1132 or via email [akrenn@indspire.ca](mailto:akrenn@indspire.ca)

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Carrie Bourassa at 306-535-6855 or [infinityconsulting@sasktel.net](mailto:infinityconsulting@sasktel.net) . This proposal for the planned study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Indspire Ethics Committee. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office (contact: Angie Krenn at Indspire by phone (519) 445-1132 or via email [akrenn@indspire.ca](mailto:akrenn@indspire.ca)).

Thank you for your valuable insight in this research.

**Indspire**  
**50 Generations Drive, Ohsweken, Ontario, N0A 1M0**  
**P: 519-445-3003**

**SECTION B: INDIVIDUAL CONSENT FORM**  
**(Please print or write legibly)**

**Name, and role in the Quarter System program of the individual** \_\_\_\_\_

**Personnel**

**Student**

**Community Member**

**Elder/Knowledge Keeper**

**INDIVIDUAL CONSENT**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the aforementioned information.

I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted regarding the research and understand I may ask questions in the future.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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**SECTION C: GROUP CONSENT**  
**(Please print or write legibly)**

**GROUP CONSENT**

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the aforementioned information.

I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted regarding the research and understand I may ask questions in the future.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
**SECTION D: CONTACT INFORMATION**

Please provide your contact information if you would like to be contacted to review your transcript and/or receive a copy of the research results.

EMAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_