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Four Directions First Nations, Métis and Inuit Graduation Coach Approach

Dryden High School

March 2018

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Preface

Nurturing Capacity: Building Community Success

Indspire supports communities to improve educational outcomes through the documentation and evaluation of their innovative 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.

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Abstract

Four Directions First Nations, Métis and Inuit Graduation Coach Approach (“Four Directions Approach”) is a system that provides intensive support to Indigenous students and their families with the goal of seeing each student through to graduation and transition into their desired post-secondary programs. The core of the Four Directions Approach is to develop a network of committed leaders to support Indigenous learners and strive to facilitate their successful graduation. An integral part of the Four Directions approach is to provide students with a Four Directions Graduation Coach (FDGC) that has deeply rooted experiential ties to the Indigenous community(ies) and their culture(s). The FDGC acts as a mentor and an advisor to the students and plays an essential role as an advocate for each learner with teachers, other school staff and families.

It is the overall goal of the Four Directions Approach to support students of First Nations, Métis and Inuit heritage through:

- 1) Strengthening the knowledge and skills of educators;
- 2) Establishing trusting relationships with students, their families and the community;
- 3) Identifying and removing barriers to student success; and
- 4) Identification of beneficial strategies, milestones and indicators to support graduation and successful transition into post-secondary pathways.

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Executive Summary

The Four Directions (FD) Program at Dryden High School (Dryden, ON) is a high school Graduation coach program that aims to both support students in their education and to encourage communication within the professional learning community to identify and address barriers to learning. The program emphasizes a focus on the individual needs of students and ensures that supports are in place for their success. Information regarding the FD Program has been adapted from a working document entitled “Four Directions: Mapping the Work Throughout the Year”. This document has been developed by the Four Directions Core Team which includes administrators, teachers, and Ontario Ministry of Education representatives.

There are many important aspects to the Four Directions program, beginning with the development of supportive relationships between the students and a “Circle of Caring Adults”, including teachers, school staff, parents/caregivers, as well as community supports. These relationships are encouraged and coordinated by the Four Directions Graduation Coach who aids the school/board in establishing trusting relationships with the students as well as their families and communities. The Circle of Caring Adults allows students to receive support specific to their needs and as part of this circle the graduation coach acts as a link between supporting students and improving educational practices to better meet their needs. It should be noted that, although this project focused specifically on Dryden High School, the Four Directions Program has been adapted within other district sites.

The Four Directions Program is unique in their “*Learning as we go*” initiative which uses real-time communication to provide helpful information to those supporting Indigenous learners.

There are three purposes of this online community including

- 1) Identifying the individual needs of the students, adapting professional practices, and allowing collaboration among the Circle of Caring Adults,
- 2) Sharing information on the FD Graduation Coach Program to boards and schools interested in implementing a Four Directions program, and
- 3) Becoming part of the larger Four Directions First Nation Métis Inuit Graduation Coach Professional Learning Community.

Specific educational achievements include:

- ❖ An increase in credit attainment from 60% of Grade 9 students to 90% after program implementation.
- ❖ A decrease in dropout rate from 16% of students leaving school after the first semester of Grade 9 before program implementation at Dryden High School to 2% following implementation.

- ❖ In the Grade 10 student cohort, approximately 70 % of the 48 self-identified Indigenous students have attained the critical marker of 16 credits which is a strong indicator of high school graduation.
- ❖ Development of strong and intentional transition programming that begins in Grade 8 and extends to post-secondary.
- ❖ First four-year cohort on track for graduation in 2017/18 school year.

As a result of these promising initial findings the Keewatin-Patricia School Board intends to continue to develop and expand the Four Directions Program to other district sites. Additionally, there have been other school districts, from across Ontario and Manitoba, interested in the program. The Four Directions Program has been inspired by other models including High School Graduation Coach Programs within the United States as well as Edmonton Catholic Schools, however, it is apparent that the Keewatin-Patricia School Board and more specifically the staff within Dryden High School have adapted this program to be uniquely contextual to their students' needs.

Four Directions Approach – FNMI Program

Description of the Program



Four Directions District
Banner with Four
Directions Logo

In 2013, the Indigenous population under the age of 19 represented 38.5% of the total youth population in the Kenora-Dryden, Ontario area which is the geographical area where the Four Directions (FD) Program is situated. The Kenora-Dryden area is in Treaty 3 territory. It has a significant Indigenous history with 42 First Nations within the political geographical territory as well as a strong Métis population. The FD program is implemented in the Keewatin-Patricia School Board which is in the Kenora district in northwestern Ontario. Currently the school board is facing an increased projection in student population data with 4864 students projected for the 2017-18 calendar year. The Indigenous population within the Kenora area is expected to climb to 43% by 2041, according to the Northern Policy Institute. The Keewatin-Patricia District School Board has seen the percentage of students identifying as Indigenous grow from 40% in 2007-08 to 53% in 2017-18. Of the 46 Indigenous students who started Grade 9 at Dryden High School in 2012, only 18 received diplomas last spring which equates to a 39 % graduation rate.

Reports from the 2011 National Household Survey (2016) show that just over 1.4 Million people, representing 4.3% of the total Canadian population, self-identified as being Indigenous. A majority of the total Indigenous population identify as First Nations (60.8%), Métis (32.3%), or Inuit (4.2%), with just under 3% reporting other Aboriginal identities or more than one Aboriginal identity. It was additionally reported that Indigenous youth (15-24 years of age) represent 18.2% of the total Indigenous population, and 5.9% of all Canadian youth. Ontario is home to the highest percentage of people that identify as Aboriginal, with 301,425 people, accounting for 21.5% of the total Indigenous population in Canada.

Given the increasing Indigenous population and the identified graduation gap it is important to address the ongoing educational barriers for students, families and communities further enhancing the opportunities to be successful within school. Developing strategies to see students through high school graduation and developing intentional transition strategies to support post-secondary entrance has the potential to significantly benefit Indigenous youth, families and their communities. Information from the 2011 National Household Survey (2016) shows that 28.9% of Indigenous people

aged 25 to 64 had 'no certificate, diploma, or degree', including a high school diploma, compared to 12.1% of non-Indigenous people in the same age group. However, there are some exemplars that signify changes to these statistics. For example, the High School Graduation Coach Program (HSGCP, 2012) at St. Joseph's High School in Edmonton, AB, has been extremely successful in increasing the graduation of Indigenous students through strong support systems.

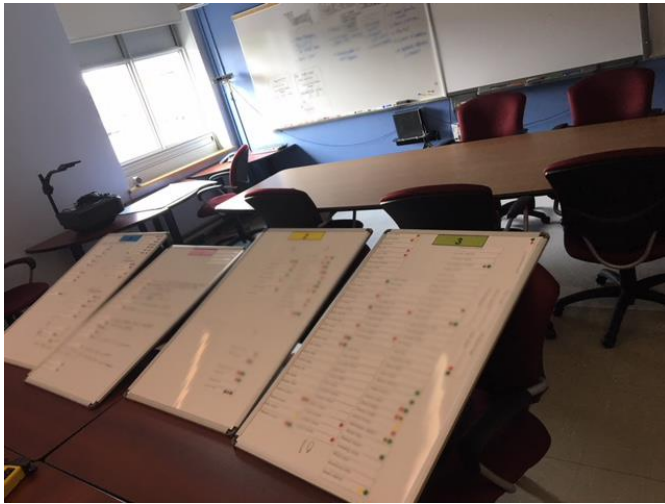
Prior to the implementation of the Four Directions Program (2008-2009 school year), the graduation rate was 14.9%. In as little as 2 years, the graduation rate increased to 43.8% in the 2010-11 school year which surpassed the provincial FNMI graduation rate at the time (40.2%). The encouraging data from the program as well as other research on high school graduation programs was a catalyst for the FD program in Dryden High School. A site visit to Edmonton as well as ongoing correspondence provided a framework to reference the implementation of the FD program in Dryden High School. It is important to note that significant community consultation was also a part of the strategic planning process and implementation strategy for the FD program in Dryden High School.

Justification for Programming

The need for systemic change is further highlighted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) which calls to "eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians" (p. 2). There is evidence within other program models outside of Canada that emphasize the importance of safe and caring school communities that support the development and nurturing of strong Indigenous identity leading to enhanced educational efficacy. Brokenleg & Van Bockern (2003) and Carpenter et al. (2008) discuss The Circle of Courage as a holistic approach to reclaiming youth. "In order to thrive, all children need the opportunity to be reared in schools and communities that cultivate belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity" (Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2003, p. 22). The DRUMBEAT program (Faulkner, 2012; Faulkner, Ivery, Wood, & Donovan, 2010) was implemented across Australia and New Zealand to support Aboriginal youth, which most often exhibit risk factors associated with academic struggles. Faulkner (2010) describes the program as having a strong focus on values, "a focus that mirrors the underlying philosophy of the Circle of Courage model" (p. 19). These programs validate the need for enhanced programming models that are culturally responsive to the needs of Indigenous youth within schools.

The Four Directions (FD) Program at Dryden High School (Dryden, ON) is an example of a High School Graduation Program Model that aims to both support students in their education and to encourage communication within the professional learning community to identify and address barriers to learning. The FD program in Dryden High School has some program elements that are similar to the High School Graduation Program Model within the Edmonton Catholic School Board however, the Dryden High School is distinctly different in its implementation, use of real time data to inform decision making

and intervention approaches as well as the unique contextual feature of insisting that the Graduation Coach will not be a certified teacher to uniquely meet the needs of students within the school. The program emphasizes a focus on the individual needs of students and ensures that supports are in place for their success. Information regarding the FD Program has been adapted from a working document entitled “Four Directions: Mapping the Work Throughout the Year” which is an evaluative template that was implemented at the time of program implementation. This document has been developed by the FD Core Team which includes administrators, teachers, and Ontario Ministry of Education representatives.



Four Directions student intervention charting

There are many important aspects to the FD program, beginning with the development of supportive relationships between the students and a “Circle of Caring Adults”, including teachers, school staff, parents/caregivers, as well as community supports. These relationships are encouraged and coordinated by the FD Graduation Coach who aids the school/board in establishing trusting relationships with the students as well as their families and communities. The Circle of Caring Adults allows students to receive support specific to their needs and as part of this circle the school staff act as a link between supporting students

and improving educational practices to better meet their needs. It should be noted that although this project focused specifically on Dryden High School the FD Program has been adapted within other district sites.

Brief History of the Project

The Four Directions Approach is based on work that has previously had success in supporting student learners. Its initial foundation was in the city of Atlanta, Georgia where a High School Graduation Coach Program (HSGCP, 2012) successfully increased the high school graduation of African American students. This approach has similarly been utilized to address the graduation gap of other minority student populations including students of Indigenous and Hispanic heritage. It has been noted that in the Indigenous context, a graduation coach works harmoniously with traditional cultural values and aims to encourage students through the promotion of positive relationships and identity development.

A HSGCP was first adapted in Canada in 2009 by the Edmonton Catholic School Board to support Indigenous students through the provision of a full-time graduation coach position and a space for First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students to meet with the coach, tutors, and other students. Following the introduction of the HSGCP at St. Joseph High School in Edmonton graduation rates of Indigenous students increased from 14.9% in 2008-09 to 43.8% in 2010-11. This approach was introduced and significantly adapted in Ontario by the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board (KPDSB) in 2014 in order to do “whatever it takes” to address the long-standing graduation gap between their self-identified Indigenous students and all students in KPDSB. The work is designed to support both students and adults/staff in learning and implementing effective practices, as well as, identifying and building upon the strengths of communities through engaging parents, caregivers and guardians.

In 2016, recognizing the moral imperative to close the graduation gap between self-identified Indigenous students and all students in their board and based on their own needs assessment, Lakehead District School Board requested the support of a ministry evaluator through the Research, Evaluation and Capacity Building Branch. The evaluator worked in conjunction to facilitate the planning, implementation and the developmental evaluation of the Four Directions Approach in two secondary schools with a high Indigenous population in the city of Thunder Bay. The Four Directions Graduation Coach Approach is well-recognized by the Indigenous community.



Dryden High School banner

The FD Program is unique in their “*Learning as we go*” initiative which uses real-time communication to provide helpful information to those supporting Indigenous learners. There are three purposes of this online community including:

- 1) Identifying the individual needs of the students, adapt professional practices, and allow collaboration among the Circle of Caring Adults,
- 2) Sharing information on the FD Graduation Coach Program to boards and schools interested in implementing a FD program, and
- 3) Becoming part of the larger FD FNMI Graduation Coach Professional Learning Community.

Major Objectives of the Project

The objectives of the Four Directions Approach are to:

- ❖ Transform school culture and enhance the collective knowledge of the educators to strengthen their skills and knowledge related to the learning needs of all students, specifically those students of First Nations, Métis and Inuit heritage.
- ❖ Further establish trusting relationships with FNMI students, their families and communities to develop a greater level of confidence in the efficacy of the student's education.
- ❖ Identify and remove barriers to better enable FNMI students to engage in school and to facilitate their learning, well-being and achievement.
- ❖ Identify strategies, milestones, and indicators to support FNMI students to achieve credits, graduate and transition successfully into their chosen post-secondary pathway.
- ❖ Use *Learning as we go* to provide real-time communication and identify specific needs of students, share information with boards and schools interested in implementing a FD Program, and contribute to the larger FD FNMI Graduation Coach Program Professional Learning Community.



Graduation Coach and Ministry of Education Representative

Connections to Indspire Principles:

Principle 6: Programs, schools and systems are responsive to both the aspirations and the needs of Indigenous peoples.

It is evident through the evaluation that this program within a school system is uniquely responding to the distinct needs of youth, families and the larger community. The reflexive process of auditing current practices and relying on data that helped determine a significant gap in Indigenous student graduation rates led to district and school leaders moving towards implementing a focused response to this need. The program highlights are distinctive and responsive to the needs of students within school and the program requires a whole school approach to supporting Indigenous student success.

Activities Accomplished

The major activities accomplished are part of a month-to-month process that aims to ease the transition for Indigenous students entering high school as well as provide key supports. The FD program extends its reach to Grade 8 feeder schools and northern communities as they transition to the urban setting of Dryden, Ontario. As seen in this monthly breakdown and school work plans developed by the FD team with the assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Education, the scope of programming is 12 months. The team prepares a holistic and intentional approach to ease transition and support Indigenous student success. Major activities are part of the detailed month-to-month approach with various specific roles divided between the different educational partners. The 1:1 tracking is the specific approach that stands out within this model recognizing the general target population but aiming specifically with responsive strategies and systems approaches to meet the specific needs of Indigenous students. The goal of this approach is to establish relationships with Indigenous students, parents and communities through relationships and identifying barriers to engagement, well-being and learning.

Materials Developed

Task, Responsibility & Timeline	Completed by
1.1 Develop the master list of students to contact	First week in July
1.2 Send a letter of introduction	First week in July
1.3 Review students' timetables	
1.4 Student/parent meeting with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Graduation Coach	Mid July
1.5 Family Meetings	Mid July
1.6 Summer reach-ahead credit course preparation	Mid July
1.7 Ensure reach – initial and ongoing	ongoing

*Charting Work Plan developed by FD Graduation Coach team

Before the First Day of School

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
2.1 Review Timetable
2.2 Prepare Compass for Success
2.3 Grade 9 Day
2.4 Extracurricular activities
2.5 First Day of School PD Day
2.6 Two-day Cultural Training program

September: First two weeks of school

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
3.1 Homecoming
3.2 Build Four Directions Champion Teacher team
3.3 First two weeks of school: Connect with key community partners (Chiefs/Council Members; Ed. Directors; ED Urban Organizations, etc.)

September

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
4.1 Ongoing: Tracking and monitoring student achievement and well-being
4.2 Plan and send communication about the first parent teacher interviews
4.3 Tutoring
4.4 Ongoing: Compass for Success
4.5 Ongoing Connect with key community partners (Chiefs/Council Members; Education Directors; Education Urban Organizations, etc.)

October

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
5.1 Ongoing: Tracking and monitoring student achievement and well-being
5.2 Pathways planning
5.3 Ongoing: Compass for Success
5.4 Parent-teacher interviews
5.5 Leadership development Ongoing: Leadership Development
5.6 Transition Programming

November

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
6.1 Ongoing: Tracking and monitoring student achievement and well-being
6.2 Pathways Planning
6.3 Sharing in the caring as Circle of Caring Adults – inclusion and equity
6.4 Cultural Activities and Leadership Development
6.5 Leadership development Ongoing: Leadership Development
6.6 Ongoing: Compass for Success
6.7 Inspire Conference November 11-15 (Wed-Sun) – Graduation Coach pre-workshop, panel
6.9 Leadership development
6.10 Transition Programming

December

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
7.1 Ongoing: Tracking and monitoring student achievement and well-being
7.2 Pathways Planning
7.3 Ongoing: Changing the narrative in the community and engaging parents /guardians
7.4 Leadership development Ongoing: Leadership Development
7.5 Ongoing: Compass for Success
7.6 Safe holidays
7.7 Transition Programming
7.8 Sharing in the caring as Circle of Caring Adults – inclusion and equity

January

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
8.1 Ongoing: Tracking and monitoring student achievement and well-being
8.2 Recommendation for revising the timetable for semester two.
8.3 Ongoing: Compass for Success
8.4 Sharing in the caring of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students as a Circle of Caring Adults
8.5 Leadership development Ongoing: Leadership Development
8.6 January Half day transition day
8.7 Learning as we go – developmental evaluation

February

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
9.1 Ongoing: Tracking and monitoring student achievement and well-being
9.2 Ongoing: Compass for Success
9.3 Sharing in the caring of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students as a Circle of Caring Adults
9.4 Safe holidays: Family Day weekend planning
9.5 Leadership development Ongoing: Leadership Development
9.6 Pathways Planning
9.7 Discuss and plan Wed lunch activity with students
9.8 February Half day transition day
9.9 Ongoing Connect with key community partners (Chiefs/Council Members; Education Directors; Education Urban Organizations, etc.)

March

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
10.1 Ongoing: Tracking and monitoring student achievement and well-being
10.2 Review students' timetables
10.3 Holiday safety
10.4 Ongoing: Compass for Success
10.5 Leadership development Ongoing: Leadership Development
10.6 March Half day transition day
10.7 Four Directions Open House
10.8 Ongoing: Leadership Development
10.9 Learning as we go – developmental evaluation
10.10 Parent Information – including northern communities

April

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
11.1 Ongoing: Parent/Guardians Engagement
11.2 Ongoing: Compass for Success
11.3 Leadership development Ongoing: Leadership Development
11.4 April Half day transition day
11.5 Pathways Planning
11.6 Ongoing
11.7 Learning as we go – developmental evaluation.

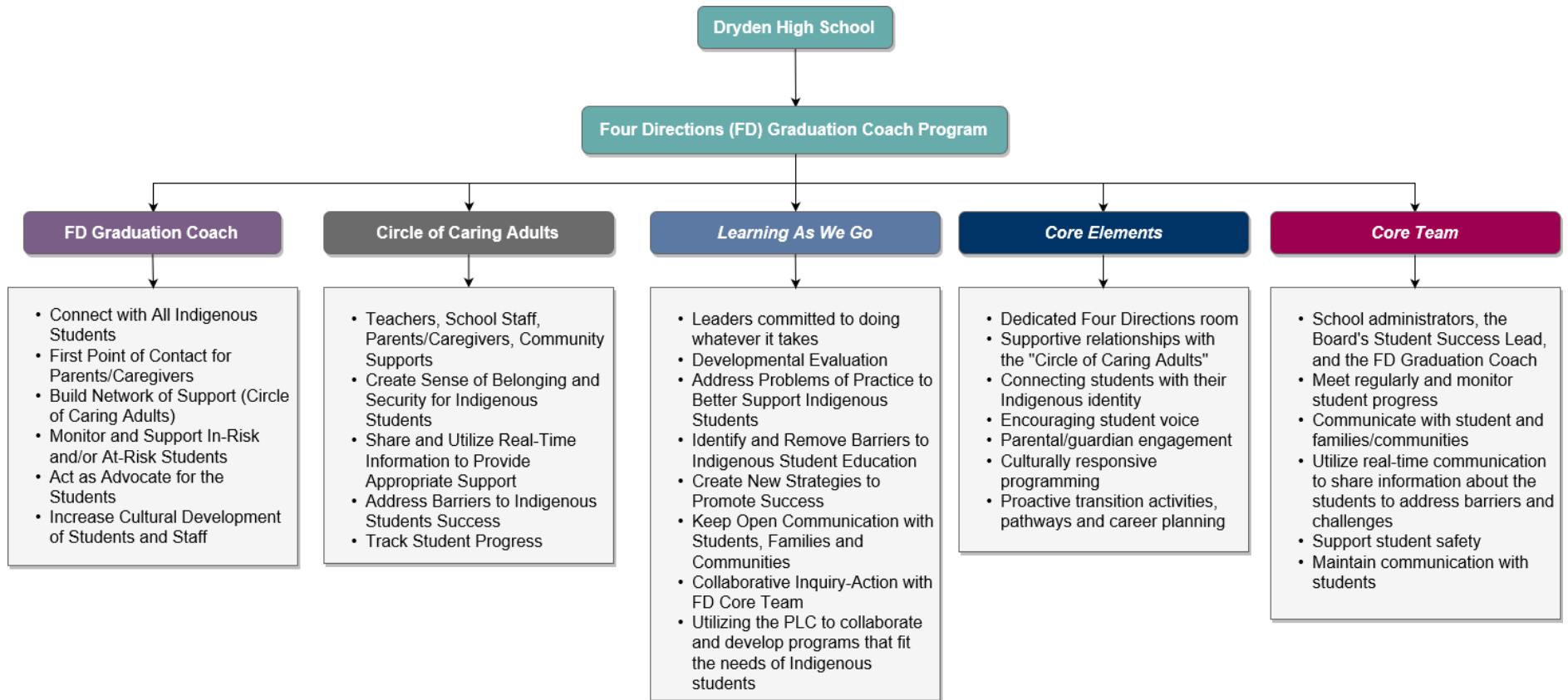
May

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
12.1 Scheduling of culminating assignments and exams
12.2 Credit Rescue/Recovery
12.3 Ongoing: Compass for Success
12.4 Leadership development Ongoing: Leadership Development
12.5 Ongoing
12.6 May Half Day Transition Day

June

<i>Task, Responsibility & Timeline</i>
13.1 Ongoing Check in with students
13.2 Credit Rescue/Recovery
13.3 Ongoing: Staff Agenda
13.4 Student Voice
13.5 Ongoing: Compass for Success
13.6 Leadership development Ongoing: Leadership Development
13.7 Communication with students/families for June Credit
13.8 Half Day Transition Program
13.9 Learning as we go – developmental evaluation.

Project Model



Structural Diagram of the Four Directions Graduation Coach Program

First Nations, Métis, & Inuit (FNMI) Graduation Coach will:

- Identify students of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (Indigenous) ancestry in incoming cohort prior to arrival and plan transition programming.
- Identify school aged youth in the community not enrolled in school and set up home visits to register potential students and build timetables.
- Build positive relationships with Indigenous students, parents and communities through visits.
- Act as an advocate and role model for the students.
- Coordinate and support positive relationships between students and the Circle of Caring Adults.
- Promote student success through coordinating student timetables and providing resources such as tutoring when needed and encouraging/coordinating participation in extracurricular activities.
- Build/maintain profiles for each individual student in Compass for Success (educational software resource) throughout the year to track and monitor student achievement and well-being.
- Participate in Cultural Training Program to educate teachers in cultural competency and support the reconciliation process.
- Build the FD Champion Teacher Team.
- Organize and facilitate leadership development.
- Put in place safety plan during breaks in regular programming (i.e. long weekends, extended breaks, etc.) for at-risk students.

Four Directions Core Team and Professional Learning Community (PLC) will:

- Meet regularly and carefully monitor attendance, engagement, and assignments.
- Keep communication open with the student and families/community to ensure students are on track.
- Work with teacher champions including the Student Success Teacher and the Native Studies teachers.
- Utilize technology for real-time communication so the Circle of Caring Adults can share information about students, be aware of challenges faced day-to-day, and support student accordingly.
- Address barriers by maintaining real-time communication with educators.
- Support the safety of the Indigenous learners.
- Maintain communication with students even during transfer/transition to other schools and support their success.
- Engage in the PLC to allow communication between all schools that have adapted the FD approach and collaboratively track student progress, address challenges of practice, and develop programs that fit the needs of their Indigenous students.

Academic Programming:

Grade 8

- (September) The Graduation Coach discusses important dates with the elementary school administrators and Grade 8 teachers.
- Determine the half day transition dates for January, February, March, April and May and works with feeder schools to arrange transportation to the high school for transition days.
- Understanding the extracurricular activities in the school, visioning for their future, and identifying their learning styles and needs are all built into these half day sessions.
- Transition Days:
 - o Half day sessions specifically for FNMI students above and beyond the other traditional transition activities of the school.
 - o Each session has a theme including:
 - Who am I?
 - Building the community.
 - Identifying supports in the school, home, and greater community.
 - A day in the life of a Grade 9 student.
- The Graduation Coach works with feeder schools to receive the names of FNMI students transitioning to High School the following year and communicates with the families to gather consent to participate in transition programming.
- (July/early August) The Graduation Coach reaches out to parents and continues relationship building activities with families and students.
- (Last 2 weeks of summer) The school runs a reach ahead course for FNMI students to further build the community and skills for success in secondary school.
 - o Course aims to develop learning skills, build the students network of support, and build relationships with key school and community staff.
 - o It is important that barriers to participation in this program are removed (transportation, food, supplies).
 - o Provides opportunity for students to build their community with the coach and core team, and to feel a sense of belonging in the school before the rest of the students arrive.
- Ensure timetable review with student and family so they understand the course codes, and pathways.

Grade 9

- Students are linked to the extracurricular activities that are of interest to them and supported by the Graduation Coach with the necessary resources to attend and participate (equipment, transportation, etc.).
- The Graduation Coach does a strengths assessment with students to help develop their sense of self and confidence in themselves.
- The Graduation Coach also plays close attention to their transition into school and identifying where challenges may be arising early on to support student success.
- Leadership/culture camp.
- Summer civics and careers course.
- Grade 9/ 10 bundle credits and transition programs for students who require accommodations and additional supports to get used to the secondary environment.
 - o In this program, the teacher comes to the students who often have gaps in their learning so they spend most of the day in one location instead of having to navigate through a large student body in a large high school building.
- Reach ahead summer programs for Indigenous students to help them stay on track:
 - o i.e., Grade 9 – become familiar with how credit bearing courses work and how to gain a credit; Grade 10 Civic/Career with experiential learning component; Grade 11 paid summer co-op; Grade 12 – to be explored, etc.
 - o Grade 11/12 Transition programs for students based on students chosen pathways including Dual Credits and other supports.

Grade 10

- Timetable reviewed prior to the start of the school year, ensure that it is reflective of the students' academic needs and interest areas.
- Support for attending local events related to interests, and vision planning.
- In 2nd semester, review the students' pathway plan and course selection are aligned with their goals Summer COOP and 'Earn and Learn' summer jobs.
- Linking students to organizations that will support their transition post-secondary education (ONWA, Metis Nation, Friendship Centre).
- Connecting students with mentors who are from their community and working in their interest areas.
- Work on resume building and job readiness.

Grade 11

- Create opportunities for students to visit the educational institutions that can support their post-secondary transition workplace experience then ensure COOP placement or mentorship.
- Dual credit participation where appropriate and specific review of pathway and course selection Indspire SOARING participation.
- College and University Tours Skills Canada Competition
- Support with Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program where appropriate.
- Support and encourage attendance at college and university presentations as well as local and regional career fairs.
- Summer learning options (peer tutoring with Grade 9 and 10 courses, designing your future course, summer coop, dual credits).

Grade 12

- Early review of timetable and pathway with student and parent.
- Targeted invite to the college and university presentations depending on desired pathway.
- Support with guidance, and Life After High School Program (where relevant) for applications to college and university, ensure that applications are completed, work with students to share bursary and scholarship information and assist students with band funding applications.
- Assist students and families with attendance at graduation ceremony, graduation photos and grad gowns.
- Mentoring and coaching students through the Grade 12 panic.
- Linking students to the Indigenous learning support centers and their post-secondary institution working with students and families to ensure transportation and housing post-secondary.

Post-secondary transition

- In conversation with Confederation College for a Four Direction Approach for transitioning from secondary to post-secondary.

Learning as We Go Approach Diagram



Logic Model Used for the Project

The Dryden High School Four Directions Program is a Graduation Coach Approach to reduce the graduation gap between self-identified Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students through customizing support to the students. Through interacting closely with students and an interest in developmental evaluation (also known as - *learning as we go*) the FD Core Team is able to either adapt current programming or create/implement new strategies to promote students' successful engagement in all aspects of their education. At the core of the FD Approach are committed leaders dedicated to doing "**whatever it takes**" to ensure all students have equal opportunities and are supported towards success. The Theory of Change logic model developed by the FD Team is included in Appendix A.

Performance Indicators and Measures

It is a key objective of the FD Program to encourage Indigenous students towards high school completion. Through identifying indicators of positive academic outcomes, we can determine the success of the program. Some of these indicators include an increased proportion of Indigenous students on track to graduate as they progress through the grades and ultimately an increase in the graduation rate of these students. We can further measure the performance of this program by comparing the progress of students involved in the FD Program throughout their high school education to those that, for example, transfer into Dryden High School after Grade 8.

Another goal of the FD Program is to inspire a more positive perception of the educational system and the FD Program as well as establishing trusting relationships between the students, their families and the community. We can track this progress through periodic interviews of students to determine whether students are excited to participate in their education and whether they potentially plan to pursue a post-secondary program. Interviews of some parents, guardians, and members of the community can help determine changes in their perceptions as well.

Goal	Measure	Success Indicators
Support successful transition of Grade 8 students into high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track credit accumulation and drop out rates • Participation in transition days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Less students dropping out in Grade 9 ✓ Increased student participation
Encourage academic achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of student credit accumulation • Real-time data collection • Calculated drop out rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More FNMI students on track to graduate each year ✓ Reduced drop out rates ✓ Increased high school completion
Improved perception of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff impact statements • Anecdotal reports and interviews • Student voice information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased student engagement with their education and extracurriculars ✓ Increased positive outlooks on education and the transition into post-secondary programs
Increase parental/caregiver engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews and conversations with parents/caregivers • Participation of caregivers in the educational programming • Communication and trust between caregiver/parents and the GC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased engagement of parents/caregivers for in-school case conferences, events and meetings ✓ Open communication between parents/caregivers and the GC
Encourage and support interest in post-secondary programming and entrance into the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest and participation in information sessions and planning for post-secondary • Communication of interests to GC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased student transition into post-secondary programming and workforce ✓ More FD cohort students becoming leaders in the communities

Interviews

A Circle Conversation with the First Cohort of Four Directions Youth 2017-06-12

Question 1: Can you tell me more about the FD program and why it might be important for youth?

S1. It is a safe place. It is the best place for me.

S2. It's our community when the school is mostly white. There are not a lot of us brown kids in the academic classes, this place we can feel good and safe and smart. It is a good place for us to learn.

S3. Creates opportunity for diversity it opens up language culture and opens all these things up it's not just for us.

S4. An open door for everyone.

S5. It's a pathway for us... there is food and safe spaces.

S6. It helps with my courses and somebody helps me to think about college. I don't have that in my life.

Question 2: What are your plans beyond graduation? Does the FD program help you with this?

S1. Post-secondary, I want to get my degree in Biology and then Medical school in Toronto.

S2. I am going to continue to learn Ojibway language in school, out of school and in my personal life.

S3. I am going to change the education system with language and politics so it is more fair for kids like me.

S4. I want to do a business course and then be a realtor after that. I think it would be a great job I am learning about this through my courses here.

S5. I want to go to UBC and I like the structure with the numbers and be a financial advisor. I went for a visit to UBC and I really fell in love with it. I can see myself there.

S6. I want to go to the University of Ottawa. I'd like to be a surgeon someday. I am going with my grad coach to take the summer internship program in Toronto to understand more about this career.

Question 3 What wise words do you have for the new cohort of FD students?

S1. I'd say keep your attendance up even when you don't feel like going. Do the things you love doing. Pick the courses that interest you.

S2. Don't let yourself go off the path you are trying to go on. Don't be doing drugs, smoking and the bad things that distract you from the best goals.

S3. Just keep trying in school this will determine so much of your life in the future.

S4. Keep with the good people always.

S5. Stay focused on goals don't let the negative creep in. Stay with the positive people they will help you find these goals that you set for your future.

S6. This program can help change you if you let yourself go with it.

S3. Everyone has hard parts to their story you have to keep going even if it is bad at home or in school or in other places. It's possible.

S4. We are so excited to walk the stage, we are the first group!!

Grad Coach: I always have to leave when they speak because I am going to cry when I hear all these stories. These amazing young people will be able to help with the younger students that are coming into the school. We are building something special here because of these youth.

Key threads from interview:

- The physical space was key to the success and filled a need for the students as a place where they could connect within the institution.
- Life gets difficult at times so students need spaces to disrupt the challenges and re-set.
- Key adults in mentorship roles can help students and families negotiate the school landscape.
- Students have hopes and dreams and schools can help Indigenous youth achieve these possibilities when there is detailed intention and programming.
- These students will serve as mentors for new students. Inter-generational reverberations can positively shift outcomes for future students.

Interview with Principal Scott Urquhart

Question 1: Can you describe your role in relation to the FD program within this school?

I see my job as a gatekeeper to keep the people safe and lobby on their behalf, make sure they have the resources, the funding, they need in order to really do that creative innovative work with kids.

Question 2: As an instructional leader can you tell me about some of your own personal career history?

I started in 1986 as a teacher then department head and vice principal into principal in the early 2000's. In 2009 I was asked to go to work at the board to take on the student success leader role and this is where some of the best work took place.

2008-09 until just this past Christmas I was working with our board (at the senior level). I came back here to Dryden High School where we have 3 senior administrators that are retiring, there is a bit of a re-organization going on right now. We have a new Superintendent starting in August, she will look after the student success projects for the board and all of the secondary schools.

Question 3: Where do you get that vision for youth success, and in particular Indigenous youth?

I got to work with some great people early on to help me with my teaching. One thing I never learned in University is that this is a Human Business, it's a people business. It's not a curriculum business (that's just a part of it). I always approach things what I learned from my family and my roots. The most important thing is to help people and serve people.

When I first started teaching it took a few years for me to see the real differences. There were way more students here in comparison to my school experiences. Classes were big. Some students did really well, others not. And then becoming an administrator, vice principal role you get crystallized. We had 1200 students, Indigenous students made up 25% of the school population and I started seeing a revolving door of Indigenous youth coming through my office. I got it. When I was teaching, it didn't take very long for a former VP to come see and said, "Hey I see you did really good with these kids that are struggling." I got an opportunity. It all came together for me. About half way through my career a light bulb came on for me.... that with Indigenous kids, whatever we were doing, it just absolutely wasn't working.

I didn't see a system that was very responsive at all.

When I became a Principal, we did a few new cool things. I hired an Elder. People in the board office were unsure of this. I made a job description, so I could hire the Elder. It's about serving kids. We need the supporting conditions for kids. We had some teachers and staff that were okay, they worked to some degree, but not the way they should have. It was about thinking differently. One of my strengths. I got to work with a few special people I learned that doing the same things, changing things up over and over again gives you the same result. We needed to respond differently.

What it took was inspiring innovation in people to generate ideas to try things out. I approached my career as a senior administrator with that philosophy. If what we're doing isn't working let's try something else. This grad coach work is a great example. There was the work in Edmonton at the Catholic system that we knew about. There was some work in South Dakota we could learn from. For me, it was like I really became

focused on if we can help Indigenous youth with a vision, build self-confidence, self-esteem in the school system, then the sky is the limit.

It's not just about curriculum, it's important, but it's just one part of it. We needed to do a better job on developing people and that meant developing adults so that they were better teachers, coaches, mentors, understanders, empathizers. We were successful with this group. I watched many things come and go, initiatives and programs and I had a good handle on why I wanted the Grad Coach NOT to be a teacher. I watched other initiatives and I could see some of the things fall apart, because the individual would revert back to that "teacher world" and I wanted the Grad Coach to be a new and different catalyst.

We were fortunate to find Kieran (Grad Coach). When we hired her, we gave her this conceptual idea. You are not going to do teacher stuff, you are going to do stuff I'd like teachers to do, but they run out of gas, they don't have time, it doesn't seem to work sometimes. We asked her to work with us, we are going to do the work together and she was all in. We got the Ministry of Education to help us with the planning pieces. And then it was about focusing on kids, brainstorming as a group, what's our next step. Let's do something different. We went to visit individuals care-givers, we ate with them. We are here because we want to serve you. For me I've always been a servant leader.

Question 4: Take me back to the time when you came across this Grad Coach program. Where is that on your timeline?

It was probably 4 years ago, as a student success leader one of my responsibilities is to monitor the student achievement data for secondary students, specifically. I was really trying to work on the larger ministry mantra pieces of achieving an 85% graduation rate. In that role, I became so aware that our Indigenous students were pigeon holed into applied classes, into work place stream stuff that the services we were having in our schools weren't good enough to meet the needs. We weren't understanding enough what the students, what those families needed. It really showed how poor Indigenous kids were achieving as a group. They were earning credits about half the rate. So, these were things in my role that stressed me. I didn't want to see small increases, like 1% per year for the next 20 years, it would take so many years to really make a change, and many of the kids are going to pass through the system.

The Grad Coach work for me showed real potential to serve those children and families in a different way. So, when people come and look at the work, to an average person it just looks like a huge support program for Indigenous kids. They see the front end of the program; we make sure they are fed, we provide additional dollars in resources to fill that opportunities piece. Enhanced transition work. The reach ahead credits. On the front end, it's all of these pieces that are part of the Provincial Student Success Strategy anyways. As an administrator, senior level and school level, the "back end" is really interesting. How do Indigenous kids cope with Ontario curriculum? What's going on with assessment that works? Where is the land-based programming? We can all craft a narrative, but the back end of the work shows you if you have any effectiveness in your

school, or in your board. The work has surfaced a lot of stuff, and practices have changed because of that. Sitting at the senior administration table even looking at policies around tuition payments, transportation policies that didn't work. Indigenous kids in care.

I saw the work kind of helping with that changed piece, the number of Indigenous kids self-identified was climbing. Way over 50% have self-identified now as Indigenous because of the program, it is safe now. As a principal if we have over 50% of the folks we are trying to serve are Indigenous, we better know what we are doing and know what to do to really make a difference. There are still things that could improve. Next June will be so exciting [as] there are students that are going to be graduating. The marker of graduation 44-46 kids, most of them are going to graduate in 4 years, they have all of their credits. They have a pathway plan. As a human being I'm thinking how come this wasn't happening before.... these are people!

For me personally I've had my own journey. I'm a life-long resident of northern Ontario I am ashamed of what happened to Indigenous people and I have a role to play in helping to make that better. It doesn't matter if I'm an educator or private citizen. I get it. I have a role to play in that and my children have a role in that. This for me is the most effective and impactful body of work that I have seen in my career. It takes a graduation rate and doubles it in four years and eliminated that gap in Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduation rates. On the back end, I've seen improvements in communication, teaching practice, flexibility. More teachers who really understand that "they are teaching people" and their job is to develop these young people so that they have the skills to go on to be productive adults. I see this Grad Coach work as helping to change that body of teaching practice. I see individuals who were good before, they are absolutely exceptional now.

Question 5: Where do you see the work going in the future?

We were very deliberate, I thank Keiko (Education Officer Ministry of Ontario), she helped us with the implementation piece and developmental piece. We were very deliberate with starting the first set of kids here, next year at four schools, four communities. Every community is different as you know. In Dryden, there are two local First Nations. Kenora serves many more. Every year we discuss areas to improve and develop. It's gone from transition, to reach ahead credits. Pathway planning, graduation and now post-secondary work. We've staggered the work. Every year we are learning what works. Each core team adjusts the work to their situation. When we drove this bus, I wanted to get going. We engaged our Aboriginal partners to help us. We are doing this good work together and that is why we are seeing changes for youth. This has been my most fulfilling work as a leader.

Key threads from interview:

- Importance of evaluation at the beginning of the project and along the way, tracking the steps taken to inform decisions.
- "We did not hire a teacher to be a graduation coach". This approach allowed the graduation coach to work across the system and not fall into institutional approaches that teachers are at times governed by.
- Building the program as core funding through the board at the beginning of the model, not working in isolation and not grant funded, consistent funds.
- Leadership matters and schools need to be responsive to the needs of youth and community.

Interview with Graduation Coach Kieran

Question 1 Tell me about how you started with this job as a Graduation Coach

I worked at the community level for a number of years with urban Indigenous youth and then worked in some administrative positions which opened up these opportunities to work further with youth. I coached and have been very active with youth in the community for a long time. I remember going for the interview with the board regarding this job and they asked me about my vision. I shared with them ideas on how I thought it could work and they responded by saying "that this needs to work we are trying something different here and we have had little success before this time". I talked about having a safe space and resources to address and essentially remove the barriers. My secret passion is working with kids and I love when they overcome the barrier and realize the success. Every student has talent, dreams, and dreams of success. It is so different for each kid what success looks like. I love that challenge in trying to open that up.

Some is getting out of bed, walking into a classroom, talking in class, and for others getting the credits and passing classes. It looks different but we need to know the youth to understand this.

Question 2 How long have you been in this high school as the Graduation Coach?

I have been in the high school for three years and the elementary school for one year.

Question 3 Can you tell me about the community that you serve?

For the students 229 kids that is Grade 8-11 at this point 50% are First Nation and 50% are self-identified as Métis. I would say that 60% are traditional in terms of First Nation spirituality and the others might be Christian or other. The demographic is quite varied. I think we have 670 kids within the school. 169 students at Dryden High School are self-identified as FNMI. We do student surveys and parent surveys and we ask about favourite classes what they look like, feel like? We ask open questions to help us

understand what matters, and it's all relationship based. We are always going back and looking at how students look at school. When we have the winter feast we have parent surveys and little focus groups just to help us understand some of the barriers in school. It is so good to hear what parents want for their kids, it's funny no matter where you come from in terms of socioeconomics they all want the same for their kids. They want their kids to be ok in school and to graduate and feel good about school and their future.

Question 4 Where do you see the program going?

I have seen it already continue to open up and it continues to change and make a difference with not only the youth but the school and community. It is slowly starting to change, teachers are asking different questions and we are having different conversations then before. We are expanding the program and it will be good to see the impact that graduates of the program will have on all of us. It is going to change us.

Key threads from interview:

- Developing a safe space where the graduation coach can meet with youth is integral to student success.
- Parents and guardians need to be kept informed and they are invested if you create space to understand their needs in school.
- The importance of building relationships with staff is key as the role is different, teachers need to also be communicated with to form successful partnerships.
- Students have gifts and dreams and part of the puzzle is unlocking them by listening to them and guiding them to the possibilities.
- Learning to take care of our own professional and personal self-care through wellness, meditation, fitness and understanding as we are participating in work that requires attention.

Parental Interviews

Question 1: What are the benefits for your child with the implementation of the Four Directions Program?

- Increased attendance.
- I have someone to reach out to that gets me and my family.
- My daughter's confidence is growing, she is participating in extra-curricular which she has never felt comfortable doing.
- I know my child has access to healthy food.
- Other people are seeing the positive aspects of First Nations people.
- The space, programming and mentor are keeping my child out of trouble.
- This is my third child at DHS, I think my other daughters would have been more successful if they had Four Directions to help them out.
- The summer course really helped my child feel comfortable at school.
- There are great speakers in the program.
- My child knows where to ask for help.

Question 2: What could Four Directions do better (other activities)?

- Build in more access for urban students to cultural activities.
- Other guest speakers who are business owners.
- Land-based learning opportunities.
- Hunting course.
- Trapping.

Key Threads from Interview:

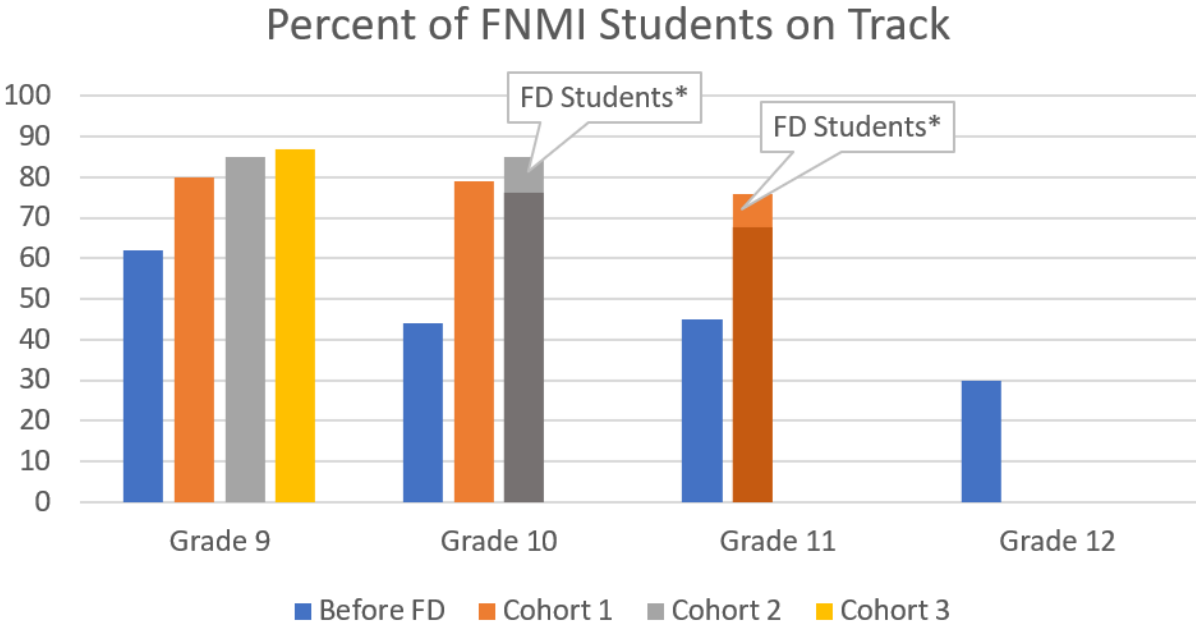
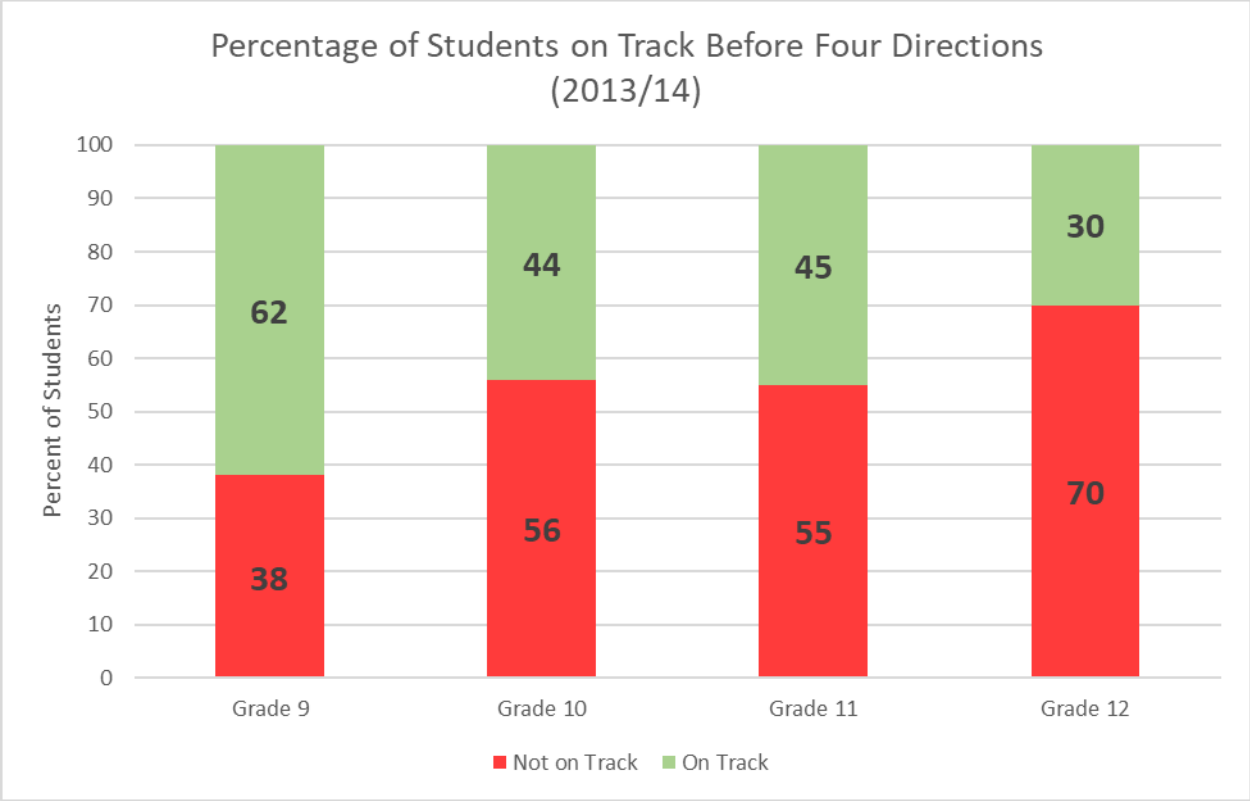
- A safe space for the families and their children.
- Easing school transition.
- Connection to cultural identity is important.
- Bringing in community members that can share their experiences is important.
- A space where basic needs are met such as a healthy snack and a place to belong.

Evaluation: Key Findings

Although we cannot yet measure the determined graduation rate (first cohort graduating 2017/18) we have found encouraging results in student credit accumulation. There has been a significant increase in the number of students on track to graduate in terms of their credit accumulation. Additionally, a larger proportion of students that were included in the FD Program in previous grades were on track compared to those that transferred into the school. As this program progresses we will be able to measure the graduation rate as well as the number of students that successfully transition into a post-secondary program.

Specific findings include:

- ❖ An increase in credit attainment from 60% of Grade 9 students to 90% after program implementation.
- ❖ A decrease in dropout rate from 16% of students leaving school after the first semester of Grade 9 before program implementation at Dryden High School to 2% following implementation.
- ❖ In the Grade 10 group cohort, approximately 70 % of the 48 self-identified Indigenous students have attained the critical marker of 16 credits a strong indicator of graduation.
- ❖ Development of strong and intentional transition programming that begins in Grade 8 and extends to post-secondary transition supports.
- ❖ First four-year cohort on track for graduation in 2017/18 school year.



*Indicates the percentage of students on track to graduate that participated in the FD program in previous grades compared to all FNMI students within that grade.

Outcomes: Most Significant Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

Significant accomplishments have been achieved as the FD program moves into its fourth year and approaches its first cohort of graduates. Indigenous students are achieving based on findings in relation to attendance, credit accumulation and on-track data that suggests a possible 40-45 students graduating June 2018. Dryden High School is one intervention site and the program is scaling up to include other school sites in the Keewatin-Patricia School Board.

Significant lessons learned along the way include the following:

❖ *Tracking the Steps*

An area that stands out within this particular program is the intention that the leadership took in studying other programs, assessing contextual needs of the school district and community and linking researchers and evaluators at the onset of intervention. The leadership team should be commended as evaluative steps and ongoing data that informed decision making was meticulously achieved with partnership and supports from the Ministry of Education. This collaborative approach provided consistent feedback and responsive approaches which laid a strong foundation for systemic changing work. The evidence is becoming clearer as the cohort will be the largest group of Indigenous youth graduating. Tracking the steps helped frame this program and the collective response which includes the very important partnerships with the Indigenous community who support the program.

❖ *Four Directions Core Team “Whatever it takes”*

Early in the process of developing the program a Four Directions Core Team was established that included a collaborative cross-section of professionals that would support this initiative. The team is critical as they challenge each other and meet weekly and monthly to study the data and communicate regarding the youth that they are serving. This is an integral part of building capacity and moving the programming values from a silo and singular approach that extinguishes after the Graduation Coach moves on from the program. The FD program does not exist through one change agent, it is a collective approach that builds memory within the institution. The mantra of "whatever it takes" clearly underlines the commitments that are needed to achieve this outcome.

❖ *Beyond Teachers*

It was made clear through the documentation and through the interview and observations that teachers matter and that they are key to so much of the work within schools. However, in relation to this work and this particular program, the FD team made an intentional choice to hire and develop a job description that would not include a teacher as a graduation coach. This is in sharp contrast to other models including the Edmonton Catholic School Board model that is cited. The reason for this shift in philosophy is that the leadership did not want the graduation coach to "slip into teacher duties" but to achieve new possibilities by working outside the scope of a teacher's daily job commitments. The leadership felt that this would allow the graduation coach to be

more responsive and attend to the details of youth and their lives within school without having to be locked into the commitments of curriculum and outcomes.

❖ ***Core Funding***

At the onset of programming it was decided through advocacy, partnership and leadership that the Graduation Coach program was going to be a part of core funding and not reliant on grant funding or short-term allocation. The Keewatin-Patricia School Board has been a committed partner in this successful programming for Indigenous youth, families and community. Many programs similar in nature have existed on year to year funding with little vision for the long-term needs of the program, severely limiting the possibilities that could ultimately be achieved.

Next Steps for the Project

The next steps for the project include expansion of the model to other school board sites and a further focus on transition to post-secondary and work force goals. The transition will include opportunities for youth who have graduated from the FD program to continue to come back "home" to the program and serve as mentors for new students which builds father capacity. The hope in this program is to continue to root itself so to speak and become even more entrenched in the student, familial, and community narrative. It is evident that the program has made a significant impact and the key is to continue to take small steps to achieve the larger vision. Changes in leadership and the possibility that the FD Core Team changes could limit the impact within this program, so careful attention and detail must be attended to realize the vast potential.

Next steps for the project could include training for future graduation coaches studying the specifics of this role as well as providing opportunities for professional development to share the experiences. As the program expands, key information sharing to engage in a synthesized process will need to take place so the programs stay with a similar philosophical approach, limiting fragmentation. A point of study and data would also include the impact on community and in particular families which could have programming impact as well as policy implications for the future.

Interactive Tools and Weblinks

Alberta Education. Edmonton Catholic Schools First Nations, Métis and Inuit High School Graduation Coach Program

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/564019/ecsd-graduation-coach.pdf>

KPDSB and Dryden High School - Four Directions Program – Student Voice Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5resiBlqNog> (Student Voice Video)

In Northern Ontario, an Indigenous pupil finds hope for success with a coach in her corner (Globe and Mail article)

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/indigenous-education-northern-ontario-graduation-coaches/article35443965/>

Four Directions – News page

<http://fourdirections.kpdsb.on.ca/pages/view/news>

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5resiBlqNog> (Student Voice Video)

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Appendix A Theory of Change Logic Model

Knowledge and Beliefs

- Graduation gap at KPDSB between Indigenous students and all students (45% vs. 71%, respectively in 2012) and can be improved by recognizing inter-generational trauma, identifying/removing barriers to engagement and supporting the needs/interests of the students
- Leaders must be committed to doing whatever it takes to endure equity of opportunity for Indigenous students
- Four Directions Program is modeled after similar programs
- A Graduation Coach with deep ties to the Indigenous culture and community can act as a catalyst for trust and ongoing communication
- Immediate intervention following stress behaviors can benefit at-risk students
- Open, real-time communication between the Circle of Caring Adults will help determine individual student needs
- Providing transition/engagement activities incorporating cultural traditions and role models promotes a sense of belonging
- Student engagement in extracurricular activities promotes a sense of belonging with their peers and motivated students to stay engaged in learning
- When students feel safe, supported and successful they will become role models and leaders themselves
- Students can be re-engaged and successful even after a major set-back with differentiated supports
- Relationships and trust need to be fostered through partnership with the parents/communities

Actions

- Use Four Directions Core Team as a catalyst to develop trusting relationships with students, their families and communities
- Build educator capacity to support Indigenous students through Professional Learning Communities and Professional Development
- Create a welcoming environment for Indigenous students
- Integrate and link new programs and supports to existing programs in order to address needs of the student
- Contribute to the Circle of Caring Adults in order to develop a network of caring
- Utilize developmental evaluation to Learn as we Go in refining the Four Directions Program

Goal

Transform the culture in schools such that educators have the collective knowledge, skills and disposition to understand and effectively respond to the learning needs of all students, specifically those of Indigenous heritage who have not yet achieved success

- Establish trusting relationships with the students, families and communities to increase confidence in the delivery of a culturally responsive education
- Identify/remove barriers to student engagement and learn how to better support Indigenous students to succeed
- Identify strategies, milestones and indicators to support Indigenous students to achieve success, graduate and transition into their desired pathways