
COLLABORATION WITH NATIVE EDUCATION PROJECT

Holy Family Catholic Regional Division No. 37

Peace River, Alberta, Canada

The Holy Family Catholic Regional Division No. 37 has a Native Education Project in seven out of eight schools that seeks to effectively involve Aboriginal parents in the education of their children. Because this is also an objective of the Action Teams for Partnerships, the Division recognized that these two projects should collaborate to fulfill this common goal.

Both the Native Education Project workers and the Action Team for Partnerships members bring unique perspectives, knowledge, and skills to this endeavor. The Action Team leaders recognize that the Native Education workers are an invaluable resource for understanding Aboriginal cultural issues. The Native Education workers recognize that Action Team members have the expertise of the framework of six types of involvement and strategies for partnership program development. A district-level opportunity for dialogue between these two groups would increase their effectiveness to support Native parents in their involvement with schools.

The first district-level meeting for the Action Team leaders and Native Education workers convened to address challenges to partnerships between schools and Aboriginal parents and to generate strategies to meet these challenges. A follow-up meeting monitored the extent to which this information transferred to implementation in the schools. Native Education workers and Action Team leaders collaborated on a goal and strategies that could be incorporated into both project plans.

After the initial meeting, not all schools used the information to begin the dialogue at their respective locations. Consequently, there was no consistency in the development of the strategies for building partnerships between schools and Aboriginal parents. The Division perceived that one reason for this inconsistency might be attributed to the nature of the Native Education workers' positions. These individuals have many responsibilities within their schools, including monitoring attendance of Native students, and therefore have less time for other initiatives. Additionally, the strategies were not incorporated into the initial Action Plans for Partnerships; hence, they were not necessarily carried out. The intent was good; however, the approach was random.

The follow-up meeting enabled Native Education workers and Action Team members from each school to systematize the approach by developing one goal, as well as strategies that would target parents, students, teachers, and the community. For example, one school planned to deliver presentations to all of its Aboriginal communities about the schools' policies and rules as they relate to the School Act by the end of the 2002-2003 school year. The meeting intended that written goals such as this would establish accountability.

The only cost to these meetings was travel and meals. Money for these expenses was available through a project called "Healthy Minds and Bodies for Student Success," which is funded through a provincial initiative.

Ultimately, these collaborative meetings between Native Education workers and Action Team for Partnerships leaders benefited schools by allotting time to specifically examine the issues and connect the people who are involved in the common goal of supporting Aboriginal parent involvement in the schools. Currently, the Division is evaluating the project's process rather than its impact on student achievement. Success at this stage is defined as effective collaboration between the Native Education workers and the Action Team leaders on this objective. Evidence of this collaboration exists. Some schools have taken the information back to their staff, held discussions regarding strategies for improved partnerships between the school and the Aboriginal families, and have set some strategies for the 2002-2003 school year. This discussion is a step that had been evasive before, and the district acknowledges this action as a successful result of the division-level meetings.

Collaborating to fulfill this common goal will enable greater achievement by the Native Education workers and Action Teams for Partnerships and, most importantly, achievement by students who are supported by schools and families in partnership.

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